Do Primary Health Care Nurses Target Cardiovascular Risk Factors in Diabetes Patients?

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Background
The increasing prevalence of people with type 2 diabetes in New Zealand1 and the associated increased risk of cardiovascular (CV) events and total mortality2 has necessitated an integrated approach to managing people with type 2 diabetes based on their absolute CV risk.3 It is essential that nurses, who play an important role in the community management of diabetes, have the skills and knowledge to target CV risk factors (smoking, lipids and blood pressure).3

Aim
To identify factors associated with nursing management of blood pressure, smoking and other major cardiovascular risk factors by primary health care nurses in Auckland.

Methods
287 PHC nurses randomly sampled.
86% response rate / 26% of total PHC nurses.
210 Practice, 49 District, 28 Specialist nurses.
Completed postal and telephone questionnaires.
Information also collected on 265 (86%) diabetes patients consulted on a randomly selected day.

Results: Nursing management of CV risk factors:
Smoking:
• 16% of patients were current smokers.
• Patients consulted by district nurses were more likely to smoke.
• Patients over >66 years were less likely to smoke.
• Only 50% of patients who wished to stop were offered NRT.

Blood pressure:
• 183 (69%) patients had their blood pressure measured.
• Specialist (83%) and practice (77%) nurses were more likely to measure blood pressure than district nurses (23%, p=0.0003).
• Nurses were more likely to measure blood pressure if they identified factors for diabetes-related stroke as a major diabetes-related complication.

Cholesterol:
• 146 (55%) patients had recorded total cholesterol levels.
• 71% were above the national recommended level of < 4.0 mmol/l.

Lifestyle:
• Patients were significantly more likely to be advised on diet and physical activity if they had their blood pressure measured (p<0.0001).

References:

Implications
• Primary health care nurses are ideally placed to develop capability and expertise in smoking cessation.
• Targeting CV risk factors, is required to improve patient outcomes.

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