

Hypertension Improvement at Saco River Medical Group

Saco River Medical Group (SRMG) is involved in an improvement program to get patients' blood pressure to goal with support from the NH Rural Health Clinic Technical Assistance Network.

As of December 2015, SRMG started with a rate of 63.1% of patients with hypertension at goal. SRMG's rate of hypertension control has improved to 79.88% as of November 2017, with the ultimate goal of sustained hypertension control over 80 percent. SRMG improved hypertension control using three improvement strategies:

- Involving patients through education about healthy changes they can do;
- Educating patients on how to tell if their blood pressure is taken with the correct technique; and
- Communicating the importance of blood pressure control on their long-term health.



SRMG designed patient educational handouts that reviewed health behaviors patients could work on to improve their blood pressure such as regular exercise, dietary approaches to stop hypertension (the DASH diet), lowering body weight, and cutting down on alcohol intake.

SRMG focused on making sure staff and patients were educated on the correct technique to obtain blood pressure readings in the office. Staff hung posters in exam rooms where patients could learn about the causes of inaccurate blood pressure readings such as not sitting with their feet on the floor, smoking before a visit, having clothes on the arm when taking the reading, and drinking caffeine before a blood pressure check. We developed a handout with this information so the patients could be better prepared for their next blood pressure check. After campaign implementation, we found that patients were more motivated to ensure their blood pressure was taken correctly and tracked on their card. The patients became part of the team, reminding us and other providers if their blood pressure was not being taken correctly.

SRMG utilized blood pressure cards so that patients were able to understand why blood pressure control is so important to their health. We found that once patients understand the goals of blood pressure control, and why blood pressure is so important to their long-term health, they have greater investment in getting it to goal. SRMG developed registries (or logs) to track patients if they were overdue for a recheck. The registry allows SRMG to assess factors limiting blood pressure control such as the cost of medications, insurance coverage, educational needs, smoking cessation help, or social support.

To remove the financial barrier of blood pressure checks, SRMG implemented free blood pressure checks to encourage patients to follow up and ensure the medications or lifestyle changes were making a positive impact. All results were relayed to the primary care provider so they could continue to make adjustments and follow up as needed.

Hypertension control throughout a patient's life can prevent myocardial infarction, stroke, chronic kidney disease and other comorbidities. By preventing these medical outcomes, we can improve the long-term quality of life for our patients and reduce the overall healthcare costs to the individual, their families, and society.

SRMG would like to thank the NH Rural Health Clinic Technical Assistance Network for their help and support through this process. SRMG enjoys working hand-in-hand with patients to improve blood pressure control and aims to achieve the ultimate goal of over 80% of the patient population sustaining blood pressure control in the coming year.