

Heart Disease: Hypertension Improvement at Saco River Medical Group



BACKGROUND

Saco River Medical Group (SRMG) is an independent Rural Health Clinic located in northern, New Hampshire. They strive to provide the best care for their patients, prompting them to join an Action Learning Collaborative through the New Hampshire Rural Health Clinic Technical Assistance Network in 2015. Along with three other clinics, they were able to greatly improve the percent of patients who have a blood pressure considered to be in control (below 140/90 mmHg*) during the 5 month project period. They have continued to focus on blood pressure control and are still seeing increased rates two years later.

CHALLENGE

In December, 2015 SRMG began a quality improvement project focusing on hypertension control. Baseline data showed 63.1% of patients had their hypertension in control, below 140/90 mmHg. Their goal was to improve their rate to at least 70% control of patients with hypertension during the 5 month project.

SOLUTION

SRMG focused on improving hypertension control using three improvement strategies:

1) Education about healthy lifestyle changes – SRMG designed patient educational handouts that reviewed health behaviors patients could work on to improve their blood pressure including regular exercise, the DASH diet, lowering body weight, and reducing alcohol intake.

2) Proper blood pressure technique-

SRMG focused on making sure staff and patients were educated on the correct technique to obtain blood pressure readings in the office. They accomplished this through exam room posters, a patient handout, and staff competency training.

3) Importance of blood pressure control on long term health –

Hypertension control throughout a patient's life can prevent heart attack, stroke, chronic kidney disease and other comorbidities. Once patients understand why blood pressure control is so important to their lifelong health, they have more investment in getting it to goal.



Nurse at SRMG showing some patient materials

In addition, SRMG developed registries to track patients overdue for a reassessment. They were then able to assess if there were other factors impacting hypertension control such as the cost of medications, insurance coverage, educational needs, smoking cessation, or social support.

To address some cost concerns, SRMG implemented free blood pressure checks to encourage patients to follow up and make sure the medications or life style changes were working. All of the results were relayed to the provider so they could continue to make adjustments and follow-up as needed.

“We are proud of our improvement in blood pressure control, working as a team hand-in-hand with the patients has been very enjoyable and satisfying for our staff as well as our patients”

RESULTS

The intensive quality improvement project ended in May, 2016 but SRMG has continued to focus on hypertension improvement. During the 5 month project period, SRMG was able to improve their hypertension control rate from 63.1% to 76.2%. Their rates have continued to improve and as of November, 2017 they have a 79.9% control rate. SRMG’s ultimate goal is to have sustained hypertension control over 80%.

NEXT STEPS

Saco River Medical Group continues to focus on improving the quality of care for their patients. Since this project began, SRMG has been involved in two additional Quality Improvement projects supported by the Rural Health Clinic Technical Assistance Network.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information regarding hypertension control projects in New Hampshire contact:

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*Hypertension guidelines have changed since the start of this project. Hypertension is now considered 130/80 or above.