

# Understanding Team-Based Care to Improve Blood Pressure in Washington State

Learn about the innovative applications of team-based care being used in Washington State to help patients control their blood pressure, and what makes this approach to care successful.

## The Issue

High blood pressure is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. About half of American adults are living with high blood pressure, and this rate is predicted to rise.

## Our Research

We wanted to learn how Washington clinics practice team-based care to improve blood pressure control, understand what factors lead to success, and identify particularly innovative applications of team-based care.

## What is Team-Based Care?

Team-based care provides health services through an interdisciplinary team of health and medical professionals. Evidence shows team-based care is a promising approach to controlling blood pressure.



## FINDINGS

### What does each team member do?

**Primary Care Providers** serve as team managers. They diagnose the patient, manage their medications, and provide guidance to other team members.

**Pharmacists** help achieve medication compliance, provide education, and answer questions. They answer the physician's medication questions when needed. Some pharmacists even identify and "recruit" hypertensive patients into the clinic to receive treatment.

**Nurse Practitioners** serve as primary care providers or take on a supportive role by seeing the patient for follow up visits. Some serve as care coordinators to their hypertensive patients, scheduling appointments and developing protocols for managing hypertension.

**Nurses** follow set protocols and carry out the physician's orders. They see patients for follow up visits to check medication adherence and provide educational materials. Some reach out to patients who have been identified as at-risk for hypertension.

**Medical Assistants** check the patient's blood pressure at the start of a visit and report the reading to the physician. In some clinics, they will refer to a hypertension database and call patients to provide lifestyle coaching and medication checks.

**Behavioral Health Specialists** learn about the patient's lifestyle and provide health coaching. They teach alternative hypertension-control techniques such as relaxation and stress management. For patients struggling with medication compliance, they will work with them to create medication schedules and reminders.

**Social Workers** are often brought in to work with patients who are struggling with hypertension management. They learn about issues in the patient's life such as tobacco use, stress, depression or anxiety. They provide advice to the physician for addressing these issues.

**Nutritionists** see the patient in-clinic to talk about dietary changes to manage blood pressure and other chronic diseases.

# TAKE ACTION

**If your clinic wants to try team-based care for blood pressure control, consider these tips for successful teamwork.**

- Share electronic health records and patient registries with all team members.
  - This supports communication among team members and ensures each team member is using the most up-to-date medical history.
- Make sure there is a pharmacist on your team.
  - Pharmacists are a new addition to team based care, but essential for achieving blood pressure control.
- Practice effective communication by utilizing internal notes and morning meetings.
- "Share" patients by allowing physicians to cover for one another and allow supporting providers to do follow up care.
- Create an official protocol and structure to guide team-based care.
  - You can create your own protocol, or receive support from an outside organization like the Healthy Hearts Northwest program.



*The quality of the care for the patient is better when there is service by a team rather than just one physician."*

- Pharmacist



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*This work was supported by Grant number DP005531, awarded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to the Washington State Department of Health. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.*