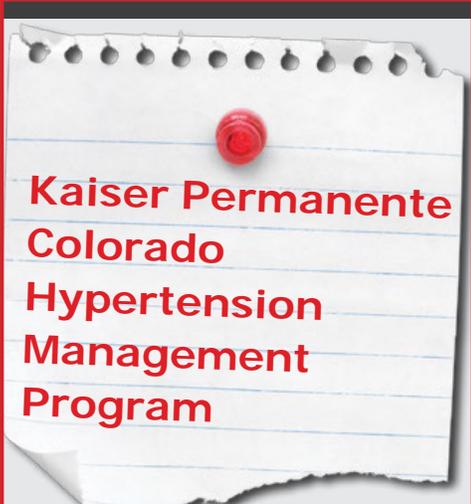# Field Notes

Kaiser Permanente Colorado Hypertension Management Program

Problem:

In Colorado, many members of Kaiser Permanente's network did not have their blood pressure under control.

Project:

The Hypertension Management Program uses electronic medical record (EMR) systems to help medical teams remain organized and provide effective care to patients with high blood pressure and other conditions.

For more information please contact

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Overview

The success of the Kaiser Permanente Colorado Hypertension Management Program largely is the result of its team-based, integrated approach to care for patients with high blood pressure. In addition, Kaiser Permanente Colorado leverages its comprehensive electronic medical record (EMR) and data systems to generate registries (lists of patients) that care teams can use to help individuals manage their high blood pressure and other chronic diseases in a proactive, organized manner. Highlights of the Hypertension Management Program include:

- An integrated care team.

- Registry data and outreach lists.

- Provision of no-copayment blood pressure checks (walk-in or scheduled).

- EMR alerts for a blood pressure re-check if a first reading was above designated levels (about 30% of re-checks show blood pressure at goal levels).

- Nursing education on correct blood pressure measurement technique.

- Physician education to promote the use of Prinzide, a combination medication to treat high blood pressure.

- Clinical pharmacy specialists who adjust medications with approval from the primary care provider.

- Promotion of home blood pressure monitoring.

- Specialty department blood pressure measurements with referral to primary care when a patient has an elevated blood pressure reading.

- Rewards and recognition for high-performing medical offices, individual providers, and staff.

The program has had a large impact because it developed restructured workflow in the medical office, making processes more efficient and ensuring that patients do not fall through the gaps. By using blood pressure alerts, registries, scorecards, actionable lists, and dashboards, Kaiser Permanente Colorado creates a culture of accountability among medical and nursing staff—everyone is responsible for providing some level of care related to high blood pressure management. The no-copayment blood pressure checks encourage patients to get their blood pressure checked routinely and their medications adjusted as needed. In addition, providing home blood pressure monitors at cost to patients encourages individuals to become more engaged in self-management.

Goals and Expected Outcomes

The goal of Kaiser Permanente Colorado's Hypertension Management Program is to lower the number of members with uncontrolled blood pressure and to improve their overall health and well-being. The entire Colorado region has set threshold, target, and stretch goals for blood pressure control rates. Every year, these goals are determined by the progress made in the previous year.

Intended Participants

The intended participants for the program are Kaiser Permanente Colorado members (patients) aged 18 years and older in the Denver metropolitan area. Although Kaiser Permanente does accept Medicaid, most members are middle income.

Progress Toward Implementation

In 2009, the Hypertension Management Program was active in primary care (internal and family medicine). The EMR system has been fully implemented for the past decade, and adaptation was ongoing to improve usability of collected data. No-copayment blood pressure checks were available in all clinics beginning in 2010. Kaiser had conducted training for frontline staff in blood pressure measurement technique, but this training has not been expanded to all providers.
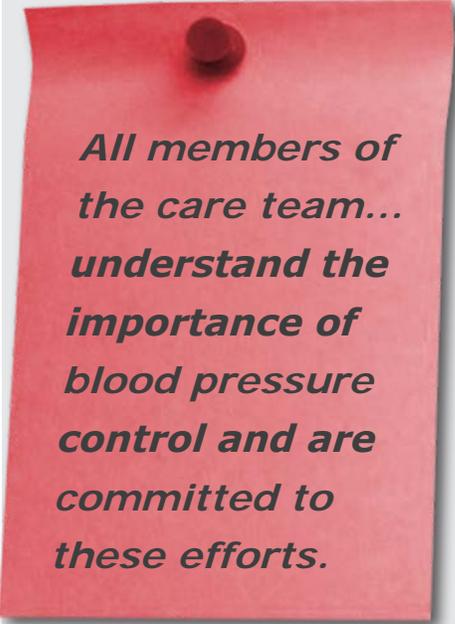
Although the program is dynamic and continues to evolve as new needs or priorities are identified, it can be considered fully implemented as intended. All members of the care team—nursing staff, clinical pharmacists, and primary care providers—understand the importance of blood pressure control and are committed to these efforts. More importantly, this program is a priority for primary care and senior leadership, and this commitment guides the implementation.

Community Involvement

The Hypertension Management Program had some collaborative elements with the Denver Public Health Department and the American Heart Association. Kaiser has attended many community events and health fairs, conducting blood pressure screenings and monitoring.

Reach and Impact

The Hypertension Management Program strives to reach all Kaiser Permanente Colorado members in the Denver metropolitan area, including more than 85,000 adult patients diagnosed with hypertension. Kaiser Permanente intends to expand the program into other Colorado regions, such as Colorado Springs and Pueblo. Currently, Kaiser Permanente Colorado is expanding to Northern Colorado regions. Program leaders feel that adherence to hypertension medications is an important aspect of blood pressure control. Interviewees repeatedly mentioned that devoting funds and other resources to controlling blood pressure is important to avoid more negative outcomes and expenditures. The investment Kaiser Permanente Colorado has made in the Hypertension Management Program has resulted in control rates going from just over 61% in January 2008 to 78% by the end of December 2010. In September 2012, the control rate had risen to nearly 83%.

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