Quality improvement

Recall to a general practitioner or to a nurse clinic improved assessment in patients with coronary artery disease


QUESTION: In patients with coronary artery disease (CAD), what is the effectiveness of audit and feedback recall to a general practitioner (GP), and recall to a nurse clinic for improving secondary preventive care?

Design
Cluster randomised [allocation concealed*†, unblinded,* controlled trial with 18 months of follow up.

Setting
21 general practices in Warwickshire, UK.

Recall to a general practitioner (GP) or to a nurse clinic (NC) vs audit and feedback (AF) for secondary preventive care of coronary artery disease

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<tr>
<th>Outcomes at 18 months</th>
<th>Mean percentage (baseline)</th>
<th>Absolute difference after adjusting for baseline (95% CI)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate assessment</td>
<td>76 (31) — 52 (29) 23% (10 to 36)</td>
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<td>— 85 (29) 52 (29) 33% (19 to 46)</td>
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<td>Treatment with antiplatelet drugs</td>
<td>80 (73) — 74 (62) 2% (−6 to 10)‡</td>
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<td>— 85 (68) 74 (62) 10% (3 to 17)</td>
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‡ Not significant.

COMMENTARY
Mohr et al investigated the “care gap” between optimal treatment and reality in managing patients with documented CAD. Participating practices (only 21 of 79 invited) were probably atypical of most British practices, and baseline standards of care were probably above average. Furthermore, the control group benefited from participation, and incremental costs of interventions were not described. Given these limitations, the study results can probably be generalised with caution.

Follow up and assessment by nurses were superior to follow up and assessment by physicians. However, prescribing in the active intervention groups was unchanged, and surrogate clinical outcomes were not improved. Adequacy of prescribing effective treatment seems to be a limiting step in optimising care. The authors partially rationalise the prescribing barrier as a consequence of negative physician and patient attitudes toward polypharmacy. Although such an attitude may affect prescribing, patients, not their physicians, suffer when effective treatments are withheld.

If patient, physician, or health system barriers to implementing effective treatments are to be overcome, radical and systematic changes rather than incremental, practitioner-dependent modifications may have to be introduced. A better understanding of factors that enable, motivate, and reward patients and health professionals for optimal behaviours is vital to considering healthcare innovations that might lead to improved assessment, prescribing, and clinical outcomes. If research findings are supportive, legal and professional regulatory changes will have to be considered.

Given the preeminent role of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease as a worldwide cause of mortality and a drain on healthcare resources, advances in the application of proven secondary prevention measures can have a substantial payroll for older, individual patients and for society in general.

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