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Neyland Pharmacy: healthy lifestyle clinic

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Focal points

- Coronary heart disease (CHD) is the leading cause of death in the UK, yet only one per cent of overall costs is spent on prevention
- It is now believed that lifestyle changes can improve health, particularly with respect to CHD
- A community pharmacy implemented a healthy lifestyle clinic and determined health gain effects on 40 patients
- Clinically desirable differences were observed in the first three months for lifestyle risk scores, blood cholesterol high-density lipoprotein, total cholesterol/high density lipoprotein, low density lipoprotein and body mass index
- This model could be adopted in any community pharmacy, offering significant health gains at a national level

Introduction

Prevention and early detection of disease are increasingly important priorities in primary health care.¹ Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United Kingdom; however, only 1 per cent of overall costs is spent on prevention.² It is now believed that lifestyle changes can improve health. Partnerships with patients are therefore encouraged to allow delivery and implementation of this message.

Validated tools for measuring relative heart attack risk³ and lifestyle risk⁴ have been combined in a software programme to assess coronary risk (Point of Care Services Ltd). As approximately 100,000 people visit a community pharmacy in Wales each day, pharmacists are therefore well suited and ideally located to promote health, providing free and timely advice.

The aim of this project was to implement a healthy lifestyle clinic in a community pharmacy and determine the health gain effects, which included lifestyle risk score, body mass index and blood cholesterol.

Method

The sample population consisted of 40 pharmacy customers, excluding those on cholesterol lowering medication. The service was publicised through local GPs, who were informed of the project and invited to refer patients, and to pharmacy customers, who were informed by pharmacy staff both verbally and with flyer information. Patients were recruited sequentially by these two methods up to the required sample size.

Data collected was according to coronary risk software, and included: blood lipid and glucose profile (from a finger prick sample); blood pressure; age and gender; diabetic status; smoking status; height and weight; fruit, vegetable and alcohol consumption; and level of physical activity.

Using the above, the coronary risk programme calculates relative heart attack risk (low, medium, high) and lifestyle risk score (0 to 100). Health advice was given by the pharmacist with referral to the GP, where appropriate, according to pre-defined criteria. Lifestyle changes were agreed on the basis of predicted risk reduction visually illustrated by the software.

Patient follow-up occurred at three months and six months after initial consultation.

Results

Consultations typically lasted 30 minutes. Clinically desirable differences were observed in the first three months for lifestyle risk scores ($P < 0.001$), high-density lipoprotein (HDL, $P = 0.01$), total cholesterol/high density lipoprotein (TC/HDL, $P < 0.01$), low-density lipoprotein (LDL, $P < 0.08$) and body mass index (BMI, $P = 0.14$). Greater response variability was seen over a six-month period.

Discussion

Reduction in lifestyle risk score, TC/HDL, LDL and BMI has a positive effect on health outcomes. Certain individuals showed dramatic health gains. Over a six-month period the BMI for four participants was reduced by 27 per cent on average. Current dependence on lipid-lowering drugs might be reduced in the wider population with significant cost savings. A healthy lifestyle clinic, based in a community pharmacy, was implemented and produced significant health benefits for patients within three months of the first consultation. These benefits included reduced lifestyle risk score, weight loss and improved blood cholesterol.

This model could be adopted in any community pharmacy, offering significant health gains at a national level.

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