NHS
Stoke on Trent
Clinical Commissioning Group

Using interactive text message technology to manage high blood pressure in the home

To help implement the NICE guideline on hypertension (CG 127) Stoke on Trent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) piloted a text message system for patients, which enabled them to manage their condition at home by sending the results to their GP practice to see if further action was required.

"The NICE guidance enabled us to implement a technological solution to give patients greater control over their condition, reduce unnecessary visits to GPs and help the CCG manage its resources better."

Phil O'Connell, Stoke on Trent Clinical Commissioning Group

Giving patients control over their condition

It is estimated that one in three adults in the UK have hypertension or high blood pressure (BP). Poor management of the condition results in thousands of avoidable deaths and hospital admissions every year. Treatments and interventions used to manage hypertension take up a lot of time and resources, which could be put to better use elsewhere in the system.

Stoke CCG piloted a simple, interactive text message system to help them tackle the high numbers of patients with hypertension in the community. The team recruited 124 patients across ten practices for the initiative, which focused on patients with chronic kidney disease and those at risk from stroke or falls.

The aim was to help these patients manage their BP at home, encourage better management of medicines for hypertension, reduce unnecessary hospital admissions and GP visits, and ensure clinical resources were targeted at those who needed them most.

Using NICE guidance to set clinical protocols and measure results

The CCG worked with a telecommunications company to roll out the text message system (Florence). To engage clinicians and instil confidence in the technology, the NICE guidance was used to develop a clinical protocol, using SMS text messaging to ask or advise patients to:

- 'opt into' or register for the service
- take their BP at home and send the results to their GP practice
- take another reading from other arm, if the results were high
- seek medical attention if results remained high
- keep their BP stable by living healthier lives

Results from implementing the service included:

- lower BP when readings were taken at home, compared with taken in clinic
- more frequent and appropriate changes in hypertension medication
- better understanding among patients of their condition
- better awareness of the benefits of healthy living to manage hypertension
- improved implementation of the NICE guideline on hypertension

Learning points for future roll-out of the programme

Although the Florence service was easy to use and implement, there were some key learning points from the pilot which included:

- the need to select patients carefully
- ensuring patients were trained to use the technology
- ensuring patients were happy to be pro active about managing their condition
- identifying a clinical champion in each GP practice to help implementation
- making best use of administrative staff in GP practices to collect data

The most significant barrier to getting GP practices to sign up to the initiative was not the use of the technology but the data collection and evaluation. This was felt to be an additional burden to clinicians' workloads. For future roll-out of the programme data evaluation would be designed to be less time consuming for clinical teams.

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