

Use of CV risk assessments must increase to combat rise in cardiovascular disease

Cardiovascular disease is the single largest cause of death in Australia. It affects 1 in 6 people – a figure expected to increase to 1 in 4 by 2050. More than half of Australians aged over 25 have cholesterol levels considered to be high.

The next NPS education program '*CVD risk: guiding lipid management*' encourages early assessment of people's cardiovascular risk to identify those who may need to commence preventative therapies. Overall CV risk assessment allows treatment to be directed to those at highest risk and who are likely to receive the greatest benefit from therapy.

"There are many Australians whose CV risk has been underestimated or not assessed at all. Using a CV risk assessment tool has been shown to be more accurate at predicting absolute risk than clinical judgment alone," NPS clinical adviser, Danielle Stowasser said.

Cardiovascular disease costs to the health system are expected to reach \$11.5 billion this year. Lowering cholesterol is known to reduce total mortality and recurrent cardiovascular events in both men and women. Statins are the drug of choice for lowering blood LDL cholesterol, however before offering statin therapy for primary prevention, all other modifiable risk factors including lifestyle, should be addressed.

The *CVD risk: guiding lipid management* program promotes:

- Early assessment of absolute cardiovascular risk
- Discussion of the benefits of lifestyle changes on cardiovascular risk
- Determining if a lipid lowering agent e.g. a statin is necessary for the patient
- Encouraging long term adherence to lifestyle changes and/or lipid lowering agents to reduce cardiovascular risk

Australian guidelines recommend assessing anyone aged over 45, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged over 35. Repeat assessments should be conducted every 2 years for people at low risk (to coincide with their blood pressure check); every 6-12 months for people at moderate risk; and judiciously for people at high risk.

NPS provides the following resources and activities for health professionals:

- NPS News (71): *Managing lipids, reducing cardiovascular risk*
- Prescribing Practice Review (53): *Absolute CVD risk assessment: guiding lipid management*
- GP and GP Registrar clinical e-audit
- Pharmacy Practice Review (audit)
- National case study
- One-on-one educational visits by NPS facilitators
- Small group discussions led by NPS facilitators (including case scenarios for GPs, pharmacists and nurses)

A consumer campaign encouraging people to discuss CV risk assessment with their doctor or pharmacist commences in April 2011.

Links to CVD risk tools online can be accessed at www.nps.org.au/cvdrisktools

For more information visit www.nps.org.au/health_professionals

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