

CASE STUDY A

Group Leader: Anne C. Goldberg, MD

Faculty Group Members:

Herb Bobo, RPh, MA

Ken Kellick, PharmD

Andrew Szczotka, PharmD

Changing Guidelines and Preventive Care

Preventive care is important in a managed care environment in terms of improving patient care with the goal of avoiding catastrophic first events. A cholesterol clinic has been following the current NCEP guidelines for cholesterol screening for all adults ages 20 years or older. A new medical director, also a heart expert, disagrees with the current practice and proposes a new screening guideline. This guideline, supported by the American College of Physicians, would restrict screening to males between the ages of 36 to 65, and for females between the ages of 45 to 65.

The new medical director fears that detection of high cholesterol levels in the very young and very old will lead to an increase in drug treatments, which would escalate costs out of control. He believes that improved outcomes have not been proven in this population. Should the new screening guidelines be adopted and implemented? If so, will some patients be deprived of cholesterol education and appropriate care?

*Written by MyNgoc Dang, PharmD
Director, Clinical Services
National Prescription Administrators, Inc.*

Recommendations

Our recommendations are that patients should be screened according to the NCEP guidelines, but algorithms should be developed for providers so that they can follow the guidelines. The providers should be educated about these guidelines and proper treatment, including where to refer people for such modalities as nonpharmacologic management and group sessions on diet, smoking cessation, and exercise. We agreed that younger patients with high cholesterol levels can serve as a hook to deal with other risky behaviors, which may have greater short-term benefits in that population than lipid-lowering treatment. We recommend that patient education be implemented as to the benefits of lifestyle changes. This can be done in a variety of ways. We also recommend implementing continuous quality improvement, including quality assurance issues, and monitoring the impact of educational efforts and algorithms that look at outcomes. ■