



# 2013 HYPERTENSION CONTROL CHAMPION: KAISER PERMANENTE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

*Million Hearts®—Success in Blood Pressure Control*

## FAST FACTS

### KPNC's Patient Population

- Serves more than 2 million adult patients in the Bay Area annually.
- 25% have high blood pressure.
- 40% belong to a racial or ethnic minority.
- 4% are eligible for Medicaid.



Joseph Young, MD, clinical lead for KPNC's efforts. Credit: Kaiser Permanente.

Facing a hypertension control rate of 40% in 2001, Kaiser Permanente Northern California (KPNC) doctors knew they could do better. First, the clinicians created a disease registry to identify and track patients with uncontrolled hypertension, also called high blood pressure, making individualized treatment possible. Over the course of the next decade, KPNC employed additional strategies to increase its hypertension control rate to slightly more than 85%, leading to recognition as a 2013 Million Hearts® Hypertension Control Champion.

## WHAT WE DID

- **Took action to improve medication adherence.** Clinicians developed a medication regimen that treated hypertension but also was convenient for patients. This regimen included prescribing combination tablets (one pill containing two drugs), making it easier for patients to remember to take all of their medications. In addition, KPNC doctors prescribed medications that allowed patients to easily change their dosage, as directed

by a clinician, without returning to the pharmacy (e.g., by simply taking half a pill or two pills). Finally, patients were able to renew prescriptions online and have them mailed for free.

- **Used team-based care models.** KPNC also focused on building a supportive team around the patient. Medical assistants checked blood pressure regularly (without a copay) until patients achieved control. By tracking hypertension control data across teams and sharing the results, clinicians were able to improve patient health.
- **Designated hypertension champions.** Each of KPNC's 21 medical centers in the Northern California region selected an internal physician to promote hypertension control consistently and serve as a thought leader. She or he provided a deep understanding of clinical care and had support from the system's administration in making any practice changes.

## Organization Information for Kaiser Permanente Northern California

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### WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED

Between 2012 and 2013, KPNC achieved a hypertension control rate of slightly more than 85%. This increase translated into more than 200,000 individuals with controlled hypertension and a reduced risk for heart attack or stroke.

### WHAT WE LEARNED

#### Success Factors

For others striving to improve hypertension control rates, KPNC recommends

1. Aligning everyone on the care team by showing them the value of treating hypertension. Change is easier when everyone is pulling in the same direction.
2. Building and using an effective registry so patients with uncontrolled hypertension can be identified and engaged directly, rather than waiting for these patients to come into the office.
3. Putting systems in place, such as treatment protocols, to ensure patients receive consistent care once identified.

“Hypertension control is part of our standard of care. Patients deserve a system and leadership that deliver.”

—Joseph Young, MD,  
internal medicine physician

### BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

When they set out to make improvements in hypertension control in 2001, KPNC staff expected to face many barriers. In reality, they found disorganization was the biggest challenge and underlying cause for lower-than-ideal control rates. KPNC staff were able to reach and exceed their goals once they streamlined processes and fully supported clinicians in consistently addressing hypertension.

### WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW

KPNC continues to use strategies that made it a champion. Over the past decade, it has seen the payoff for its efforts through reductions in poor cardiovascular outcomes within its patient population. KPNC hopes this consistent, evidence-based approach to hypertension control further improves its patients' control rates and health.