



2013 HYPERTENSION CONTROL CHAMPION: RIVER FALLS MEDICAL CLINIC

Million Hearts®—Success in Blood Pressure Control

FAST FACTS

River Falls Medical Clinic Patient Population

- Serves 50,784 patients in western Wisconsin.
- 18% have high blood pressure.
- 3% belong to a racial or ethnic minority.
- 10% are eligible for Medicaid.



River Falls Medical Clinic staff. Credit: RFMC.

Many patients in River Falls Medical Clinic's (RFMC's) population in western Wisconsin struggle with coexisting chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. To improve its hypertension control rate by nearly 6 percentage points during a 15-month period, RFMC and its sister clinics in Ellsworth and Spring Valley used standing orders, care coordination, and health information technology (IT). These improvements meant an additional 539 RFMC patients achieved blood pressure control, reducing their risk for heart attack and stroke.

WHAT WE DID

- **Used team-based care models.** RFMC physicians used standing orders that allow medical assistants to provide more independent care. For example, they could order lab work, refer patients to a dietician, and request follow-up visits for patients with uncontrolled high blood pressure. The physicians, medical assistants, and other clinicians worked hand-in-hand with RFMC's care coordinators to keep patients on track toward controlling high blood pressure, also called hypertension. The care coordinators reviewed

electronic health records (EHRs) regularly to see if control goals were met. The coordinators met regularly with the health care teams to review patient records, identified areas for improvement, and helped clinicians make changes. The nurse care coordinator titrated (measured and adjusted) patient medications based on protocols developed by the group.

- **Implemented consistent, strategic use of EHRs.** RFMC's original EHR system did not have the tool it needed to track blood pressure and other chronic conditions, so RFMC hired an IT programmer to assist in adding health tracking functions. Afterward, RFMC had a dedicated Chronic Disease Database and reminder system that captured health data such as blood pressure and generated reminders for clinicians. Alongside this digital tool, RFMC used "analog" technology, such as magnets on exam room doors, that remind clinicians to recheck blood pressure if a patient had an elevated reading. Patients whose readings remained elevated after a second measurement were scheduled for a free blood pressure check within 2 weeks.

Organization Information for River Falls Medical Clinic

Web site: www.rfmc.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/River-Falls-Medical-Clinic/150358888315566

Phone: 800-514-9204

Address: 1687 East Division Street, River Falls, WI 54022

WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED

Employing these strategies helped RFMC improve its hypertension control rate from 79.3% in April 2012 to 85.2% in July 2013. As a result, in 2013, 7,788 out of 9,141 patients with high blood pressure had their condition under control.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Success Factors

For other medical centers focusing on reducing high blood pressure, RFMC recommends

1. Being open to changing the process for managing high blood pressure if elements are not working for members of the health care team or the patient. Finding the right process may take time.
2. Helping all team members understand their roles in controlling high blood pressure so they feel empowered and like part of the process. Sharing data from the EHR system helps team members see the difference they are making.
3. Making clear EHRs do not negate the need for critical thinking on the part of staff. Give staff the information and resources they need to use provided tools in the context of broader recommendations and guidelines.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

RFMC initially faced some challenges with staff using consistent procedures for taking blood pressure readings and had no protocol for titrating patients' medications. RFMC reduced these barriers and improved consistency by checking in regularly with clinicians and offering additional training.

“It is exciting to see our process work and know that a patient has received the care they need. We all feel positive about making a difference in someone’s life.”

—Mary Boles, clinical support staff manager, quality manager

WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW

RFMC and its sister clinics—Spring Valley Medical Clinic and 2012 Million Hearts® Hypertension Control Champion Ellsworth Medical Clinic—continue to apply lessons learned in each unique setting across each location, especially building integrated team approaches to treat chronic disease. The goal is to continue to be “champions” across all of the clinics.



Blood pressure check reminder on exam room door. Credit: RFMC.