The why, how, when and where of BP measurement

Continuing her CPD series from a new online initiative on hypertension, Valerie Ryan hears about the importance of starting from the right place on blood pressure measurement, from a talk by Prof Eoin O’Brien

Learning objectives
- To understand the importance of blood pressure measurement in hypertension control.
- To be competent in the accurate standardised measurement of blood pressure (BP).
- To understand the importance of BP measurement in diagnosis and effective management strategies.
- To recognize when and where BP measurement should be carried out.

In his talk, Prof Eoin O’Brien underlines the vital role of blood pressure measurement in the diagnosis and effective management of common diseases, and in blood pressure control. He calls for the setting up of a national registry to allow further research, and for a more positive and aggressive approach to treatment of hypertension. He puts paid to the notion that hypertension should be viewed as a simple disease and discusses a range of settings where BP measurement could be carried out.

Blood pressure is the “king” of prognostic markers, according to Prof O’Brien, and is essential for diagnosis. “We don’t have anything better than blood pressure at the moment to tell us what blood pressure tells us about the cardiovascular system,” he said. He emphasizes that it is only by controlling blood pressure that we will prevent the cardiovascular consequences of hypertension.

He reminds doctors of the dramatic shift of hypertension seen in management, “This presage the future of hypertension control and cardiovascular risk,” he said. He emphasizes that many patients are inadequately managed or left untreated when diagnosed, or left untreated when diagnosed, or are not adequately managed. He also cites up-to-date figures and current studies to demonstrate the need for further study and understanding of hypertension.

Professor of Molecular Pharmacology at the Conway Institute of Biomolecular and Biomedical Research UCD, Prof O’Brien has published more than 60 scientific papers on hypertension research and has authored Blood Pressure Measurement and the popular ABC of Hypertension. This presentation outlines in unsettling detail the current statistics from international studies on the incidence of hypertension and the less than optimum levels of control achieved.

He warns that blood pressure control must be achieved and cautions that merely putting a patient on antihypertensive therapy is not enough.

The advantages and the limitations of the available methods of blood pressure measurement are highlighted throughout the presentation, supported by published statistics, international guidelines and recommendations. Prof O’Brien alerts doctors to the pitfalls of conventional clinical blood pressure measurement and argues the case strongly for Ambulatory Blood Pressure Measurement (ABPM), outlining the main clinical benefits.

He suggests what problems ABPM can identify as well as its role in assessing severity of hypertension, nocturnal hypertension and other conditions.

In the Q&A session following his talk, Prof O’Brien suggests how clinical BP measurement should be managed in practice.

He offers an analysis of the factors for the question, “Why are we doing so badly?” and provides step-by-step advice on how better control using standardised methodology might be achieved.

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