easing the pressure: tackling hypertension

A toolkit for developing a local strategy to tackle high blood pressure

FACULTY OF PUBLIC HEALTH

NATIONAL HEART FORUM

Produced by the **Faculty of Public Health** and the **National Heart Forum**

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Written by Dr Alan Maryon-Davis and Dr Vivienne Press on behalf of
the Cardiovascular Health Working Group of the Faculty of Public Health

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Easing the Pressure: Tackling Hypertension

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Foreword

Hypertension – the 'silent killer' – is a major public health problem which has a significant impact on health and social care. Yet, despite the best efforts of individuals and the existence of isolated examples of good practice, many primary care organisations still lack a truly cohesive approach to the challenge of tackling hypertension – preventive initiatives are too thinly spread, early detection is patchy, and clinical protocols for control are poorly followed. All too often the relevant workstreams fail to link up effectively to provide an integrated and seamless care pathway.

The prevention and control of hypertension are essential to national strategies concerned with coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, chronic kidney disease and the health of older people. This is why the Faculty of Public Health and the National Heart Forum (NHF) have produced *Easing the Pressure: Tackling Hypertension*. This toolkit will give local health improvement partnerships the tools they need to develop effective strategies on hypertension prevention, detection and control.

The production of this toolkit is timely, given the focus by government and key organisations such as the Food Standards Agency on the need to reduce levels of salt intake, and the pressure on food manufacturers to reduce the amount of salt in processed food. The toolkit also forms part of a wider programme of work and campaign by the Faculty and the NHF to combat hypertension. It is hoped that, through concerted local and national action, the burden that hypertension places on individuals and on society can be lifted.

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Sir Alexander Macara
Chairman
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Executive summary

Hypertension (persistently high blood pressure) is one of the most common disorders in the UK. Although it rarely causes symptoms on its own, the damage it does to the arteries and the organs they supply can lead to considerable suffering, avoidable death and burdensome healthcare costs. Hypertension is arguably the most important modifiable risk factor for coronary heart disease (the leading cause of premature death in the UK) and stroke (the third leading cause). It is also an important cause of congestive heart failure (heart strain), chronic kidney disease, and peripheral vascular disease (diseased arteries in the limbs). This has earned hypertension a reputation as the 'silent killer' and makes it a key priority for prevention, detection and control.

Easing the Pressure: Tackling Hypertension is a toolkit for developing a local strategy to tackle hypertension. It is intended to help local multi-agency teams – including public health, health promotion and primary care professionals, and strategic planners in both NHS and local government – to develop and implement strategies and action plans, not only to identify and treat patients with hypertension but also to promote healthy lifestyles and environments to prevent hypertension in the first place. There are particular challenges to developing such a strategy, including:

- choosing the appropriate combination of 'whole population' and 'at-risk' approaches
- influencing and working with local and national policies and programmes that address health improvement and the wider determinants of health
- targeting the most 'at-risk' individuals and communities in the local population
- ensuring that people have easy access to appropriate information on hypertension and on healthy lifestyles to prevent it, and
- increasing the proportion of patients who have regular blood pressure check-ups, and follow the advice and treatment given.

Easing the Pressure is designed to equip local action teams with the necessary information and tools to meet and address these challenges. The toolkit is in four sections:

- **A: Hypertension: the public health burden** defines hypertension. It outlines the risk factors for hypertension, who is most at risk and why. It also describes the burden hypertension places on individuals, on society and the NHS – its prevalence, its health effects and financial costs.

- **B: Reducing the burden: tackling hypertension** looks at the strategic framework for tackling hypertension through prevention, detection and control. It looks at particular approaches to this, including a 'whole population' approach and an 'at-risk' individual or group approach, as well as considering the supporting evidence and broad principles involved.

- **C: Developing a local hypertension strategy** gives guidance on the practicalities of developing and implementing a local action plan. It provides information on the necessary elements, including: deciding what action is needed and where it should be targeted; building local partnerships; choosing interventions on prevention, detection and control; and dealing with barriers to change.

- **D: Resources** gives further information on relevant publications and guidance, as well as patient information and useful organisations. It also contains the toolset – 15 practical, in-depth

resources including proformas and online resources to help review current activities or services and develop the action plan.

***Easing the Pressure: Tackling Hypertension* is not designed to replace current clinical guidelines such as those provided by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (now the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence), the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network or the British Hypertension Society. Instead it is focused more on the preventive and service development aspects of tackling hypertension and should be used in conjunction with whichever clinical guidelines are most appropriate.**

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