At UNC, accurate blood pressure measurement is everyone’s domain

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While measuring blood pressure is a common procedure, student training in blood pressure measurement is often inadequate and varies widely between schools. To address this, the AMA developed three online blood pressure modules to support training efforts within health care schools and standardize training from the onset.

A project at University of North Carolina (UNC) School of Medicine in Chapel Hill, seeks to set medical education on a new course by upping the training for medical students on BP measurement. One of its cornerstones is the online training series developed by the AMA, beginning with “BP Measurement Essentials: Student Edition,” which supports existing efforts by ensuring students are learning the latest evidence-based techniques.

UNC School of Medicine’s project is funded by a grant from AMA Improving Health Outcomes.

The curriculum needs to change

“When the AMA’s RFP came out saying there was a BP measurement training module and recommending all trainees complete it, I realized we weren’t teaching a comprehensive way of measuring blood pressure,” said Catherine L. Coe, MD, assistant professor of family medicine at UNC School of Medicine.

There are many variables that can impact the accuracy of BP measurement, noted Dr. Coe, who is also co-director of the school’s patient-centered care course—an introduction to clinical skills for its first- and second-year medical students.

“The modules are really well constructed and demonstrate a structured way to check blood pressure. It is patient centered and has a checklist to make sure it’s as accurate as possible,” she said.
Thinking broadly for better results

UNC has four goals for its project.

For starters, it wants to work the “Student BP Measurement Essentials” series into the curriculum at all of its health profession schools—medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and nursing. The students will work through each module and then test their knowledge in a visit with a standardized patient.

It’s also targeting communication skills.

“We think utilizing ‘Self-Measured Blood Pressure Essentials: Student Edition,’” the second module in the series, which covers how to partner with patients to improve blood pressure measurement at home, “will be a way to drive home how to do advanced communication,” Dr. Coe said. “You’re doing elements of teach back—making sure they understand the reasons why it’s important, how it can impact the treatment of their blood pressure.”

The project’s third aim is to increase awareness of inequities in health care related to hypertension through a longitudinal lecture series.

And the fourth is to pair blood pressure training with clinical reasoning and management of chronic diseases through a patient case.

Repetition is key

All first-year students have now taken the first two modules. In their third semester, they will take the “BP Measurement Refresher: Student Edition” course.

“We successfully had all 190 of our first-year medical students complete the initial module. In the post-standardized patient encounter we noted a significant improvement in the accuracy of their blood pressure measurement readings,” said Dr. Coe, whose co-principal investigator on the project is Thomas Koonce, MD, MPH, associate chief medical officer for outpatient services at UNC Medical Center.

The modules are part of the?AMA Ed?Hub™, an online platform?with high-quality CME and education that supports the professional development needs of physicians and other health professionals. With topics relevant to you, it also offers an easy, streamlined way to find, take, track and report educational activities.

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