



INSIGHTS

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, ARTICLES, CASE STUDIES & MORE

BY: MEDICAL & LIFE CARE CONSULTING

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HYPERTENSION AND WORKERS' COMPENSATION CASE MANAGEMENT :

THREE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING PATIENT AND CLAIM OUTCOMES

In January 2018, the American Heart Association published an estimate that 103 million U.S. adults have high blood pressure, which accounts for nearly half of all adults in the United States.ⁱ High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, can lead to severe health complications and increase the risk of heart disease, stroke and sometimes death. With such a high occurrence of U.S. adults having high blood pressure, it is not surprising that hypertension is the most prevalent comorbidity within workers compensation claims.ⁱⁱ

In this issue of INSIGHT, we explore hypertension within workers' compensation, and three nurse case management strategies to improve patient and claim outcomes.

When managing any type of diagnosis, a preexisting health condition has the potential to impede upon the individual's recovery. Comorbidities can prolong the claim and have been

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

- HYPERTENSION MANAGEMENT WITHIN WORKERS' COMPENSATION
- MANAGING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE



known to increase the risk of complications. In a study by Harbor Health Systems it was found that “claims associated with comorbid conditions experienced longer claims duration, higher medical costs, more temporary total disability (TTD) days and increased complication and surgery rates.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Given the prevalence of high blood pressure, it is important for nurse case managers to understand the underlying effect the condition has had on the individual’s body and develop a plan to reduce complications on the present injury or illness being treated. An effective approach to managing workers’ compensation patients with hypertension requires early identification, education to mitigate further complications, and consistent management.

An estimated 103 million U.S. adults have high blood pressure, accounting for nearly half of all adults in the United States.



IDENTIFICATION

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms, and many adults are unaware they have the condition. The Centers for Disease Control reported that over 46% of adults worldwide don’t know they have hypertension.^{iv} In workers’ compensation case management, it is critical that the nurse is skilled in identifying underlying comorbidities or other conditions which may interfere with the individual’s recovery.

When a patient presents with pain don’t assume the source of the pain is only the injury. Oftentimes symptoms of untreated or substandard treatment of high blood pressure produces symptoms which can mimic other conditions, such as headaches and migraines, pain, anxiety, and more. It is important that the nurse case manager includes an assessment of blood pressure to rule out high blood pressure as the underlying cause.

It is also important to consider the impact an individual’s emotions can have on their blood pressure. We frequently observe a patient’s blood pressure elevated by simply attending their doctor’s appointments. The claimant may also have anxieties surrounding missed work or other life stressors resulting in higher than normal blood pressure. Appropriate identification and follow-up with the patient’s primary care provider is critical. Sometimes, something as simple as recommending the patient keep a blood pressure log to review and share with the primary care provider can assist with identification.

MITIGATION THROUGH EDUCATION

High blood pressure can quietly damage an individual’s body for years before being diagnosed. If the claimant was unaware

that they had high blood pressure or don't understand the impact high blood pressure can have on their injury or illness, proper treatment and patient education is key to mitigating further complications.

Education helps patients better understand their condition, the role of medication and lifestyle changes as well as increasing awareness about the progression of high blood pressure and complications.⁹ Comorbidities such as hypertension are not compensable, yet poor treatment regimens, and out of control blood pressure can affect the compensable injury or illness of the claim.

Through proper treatment and patient education, complications due to high blood pressure can be reduced.

MANAGEMENT

With severe injuries, high blood pressure can produce alterations to all the patient's body symptoms. Consistent assessment of the patient's blood pressure is one area to monitor and adjust treatment accordingly. For example, let's consider a patient with a spinal cord injury, who normally has hypertension – controlling their blood pressure is important to prevent organ damage to the kidneys. Post injury, with standing or even position change hypotension can occur.

In addition to the systemic effects of the injury, alterations in blood pressure can result in:

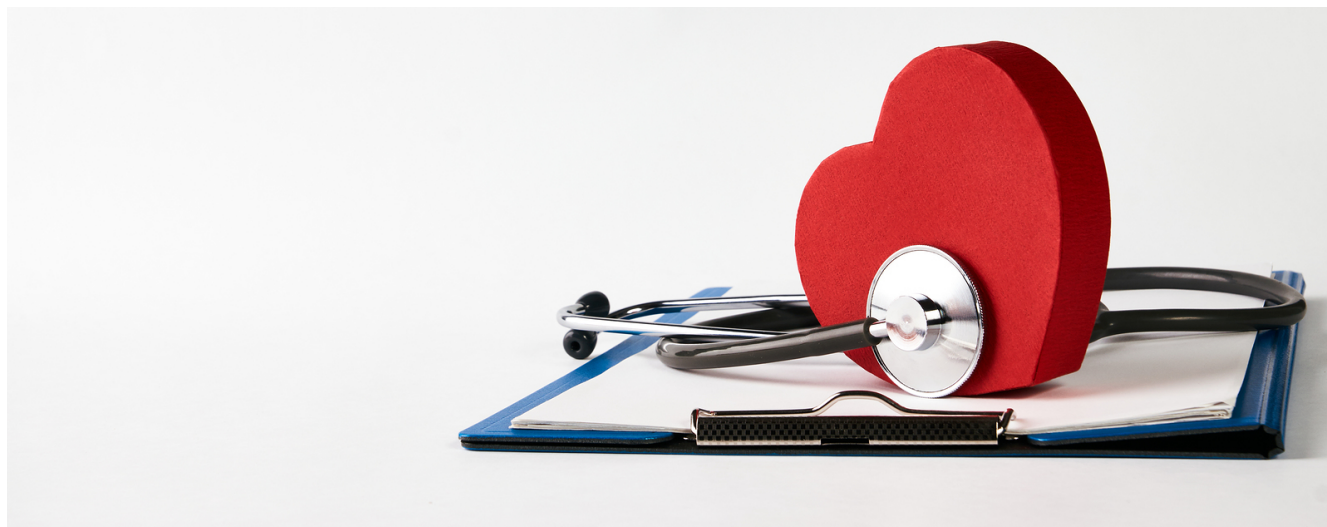
- ▶ Damage to the arteries
- ▶ Damage to the heart
- ▶ Damage to the brain
- ▶ Damage to the kidneys
- ▶ Damage to the eyes
- ▶ Sexual dysfunction

- ▶ High blood pressure complications, may include:
 - Memory loss, personality changes, trouble concentrating, irritability or progressive loss of consciousness
 - Stroke
 - Severe damage to your body's main artery (aortic dissection)
 - Chest pain
 - Heart attack
 - Sudden impaired pumping of the heart, leading to fluid backup in the lungs resulting in shortness of breath (pulmonary edema)
 - Sudden loss of kidney function
 - Complications in pregnancy (preeclampsia or eclampsia)
 - Blindness

Medication management is also vital when supporting a patient with hypertension as a comorbidity. Medications used for treatment of one condition or injury can affect blood pressure and the efficacy of the medication. Close monitoring and appropriate scheduling of medication is necessary to prevent complications. It is also important to understand the side effects of the patient's medications.

With close monitoring of all the patient's medications, and how they interact, complications can be minimized. Treating the entire person is key in managing all workers' compensation claims and is especially vital when working with patient with comorbidities.

Ensure that your claimants' recovery is properly managed by partnering with Medical and Life Care Consulting. Our Nurse Case Managers are certified case managers and properly trained in managing cases with comorbidities and improving outcomes for all.



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