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## Local pharmacies a key ally in reducing vascular disease

*New provincial strategy boosts access, screening, treatment for patients at risk*

CALGARY — Many Albertans at risk of developing cardiovascular diseases now have improved access to screening and management at their local pharmacies thanks to a new provincewide research program.

The R<sub>x</sub>EACH program helps pharmacists across the province to identify patients at risk of developing vascular diseases, such as heart attack and stroke, and to implement management strategies.

“Most people at risk for heart attack and stroke have no symptoms, and don’t realize they’re at risk until they have an event like a heart attack,” says Dr. Brenda Hemmelgarn, Department Head of Community Health Sciences and a nephrologist with Alberta Health Services (AHS) Calgary Zone.

“Pharmacists can identify high risk patients who might otherwise fall through the cracks,” adds Hemmelgarn, who’s is also a member of the Cumming School of Medicine’s Libin Cardiovascular Institute of Alberta and O’Brien Institute for Public Health.

Alberta has the most advanced scope of practice for pharmacists in Canada, which allows them to provide more patient care, including prescribing and ordering laboratory tests.

Launched one year ago, R<sub>x</sub>EACH is part of the Vascular Risk Reduction (VRR) program – a comprehensive strategy by the Cardiovascular Health and Stroke Strategic Clinical Network (SCN) of AHS, aimed at identifying Albertans at risk for vascular disease and providing screening and risk management in communities. R<sub>x</sub>EACH is an equal partnership between the Cardiovascular Health & Stroke SCN, Alberta Health, the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary.

Pharmacists at 45 pharmacy sites across the province are now in the process of enrolling up to 1,200 patients at high risk for heart disease or stroke, such as those with diabetes, established vascular disease, chronic kidney disease and who have either high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood sugar or who smoke. Around 500 Albertans have been enrolled to date.

Participants are evenly divided into two groups: one receives pharmacist-based care, the other usual care, for a three-month duration. Participants in the advanced care group receive a comprehensive medication review, an assessment for diet and exercise, smoking cessation support and a computerized tool which calculates their risk of having a cardiovascular event in the next 10 years and demonstrates ways of reducing this risk. Both groups will be assessed at the end of the three months to evaluate the reduction in vascular risk. Participants in the usual-care group will then receive pharmacist care for three months.

So far, 110 pharmacists from across the province have used R<sub>x</sub>EACH’s online education and training program. The training helps pharmacists identify patients at high risk for vascular disease. Risk factors include diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking.

Depending on the patient's condition, participating pharmacists may adapt medications, provide treatment recommendations, provide lifestyle changes recommendations, such as diet and exercise or send the patient to do blood work. During the course of this project pharmacists will work closely with patients and their family physicians to help them achieve their treatment targets.

“Community pharmacists can be a great source of health information and treatment when it comes to cardiovascular health,” says Sheilah Kostecki, Pharmacist at Glamorgan Safeway in Calgary. “Pharmacists are health professionals who are easily accessible and can assist in helping patients manage their condition, assess for risk and make recommendations.”

Ninety per cent of Albertans have at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease and it is one of the leading causes of death and disability in North America.

For more information on how to participate and for a list of participating pharmacies, visit <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/10575.asp>.

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SCNs are provincewide teams comprised of health care professionals, researchers, community leaders, patients and policy makers, who are dedicated to developing care pathways in a specific area of health that will enhance the patient experience, improve outcomes and standardize care delivery across the province.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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