

## **45 Health Check - Organisational issues for consideration**

### **Identifying eligible patients**

A large proportion of patients who may be at risk may not be identifiable by the practice. Age, sex and medications are usually reliably recorded by practices, allowing for identification of suitability for screening for blood pressure, lipids, and pap smears etc. Patients who have conditions such as diabetes and hypertension can also be identified from their medications. However, weight is currently recorded in less than 50% of patients, and height, body mass index and waist circumference are only recorded in about 20% of patients. Smoking status and alcohol consumption are recorded less than 50% of the time, and diet is recorded in less than 10% of patients. Even where the information is recorded, most current practice software systems do not have the ability to recall the information required to identify eligible patients. The practice team can work together to identify eligible patients in their practice. Some suggested methods include:

#### **Proactive identification:**

- Where practice staff are able to identify risk factors, writing to eligible patients with information about the health check.
- Writing to all patients aged 45-49 informing them of the health check and asking them to make an appointment if they think they have a risk factor. The GP would then need to confirm that the patient has a risk factor and if so undertake the health check in the same visit, or determine whether the patient has a risk factor as part of a consultation (billed under the appropriate item) and if so, undertake the health check during a subsequent visit.
- Targeting male patients within the practice, as men are more likely to have a risk factor and less likely to visit the GP frequently.

#### **Opportunistic identification:**

- Discussing the health check opportunistically with patients within the age range as they attend and identifying risk factors during a normal consultation.
- Reception staff or practice nurses could flag patients visiting the practice within the age range, and give them the patient practice prevention survey to identify risk factors.

#### **Providing information and raising awareness:**

- Providing information on the health check in the waiting room.

### **Patient readiness to change**

In many cases, the advice provided to patients undergoing the health check will require behavioural change to reduce the impact of risk factors.

General practitioners may wish to refresh their knowledge on assessing how ready patients are to change their lifestyle. The 'stages of change' model may assist in determining the best management approach. For patients who are not confident about their ability to succeed, information and reassurance about their likelihood of success and the support available should be given. For patients who are ready to make a change, time can be spent explaining and planning how to make that change. The RACGP SNAP Guide and Green Book provide guidance on assessing readiness to change and how to approach motivational interviewing.

## Referrals

It is anticipated that preventive screening will generate an increased number of referrals and will significantly affect the demand for other services, both public and private, such as physical activity programs, and advice on healthy diet and weight loss. During the consultation process, the RACGP recommended that strategies be implemented to manage the additional referrals that will be generated, to ensure that those who need further assistance are able to access it.

Prior to undertaking the health checks, it might be useful to investigate what services are available in your local area and how accessible they are to patients. A directory of referral information within the practice should include counselling and self-help groups for smoking cessation, dietician referral information, drug and alcohol counsellors and self-help groups, local programs and services for physical activity, and more specialised services such as diabetes services. Divisions of General Practice will be able to provide some information. The RACGP SNAP guide includes contact details for a number of national services for behavioural risk factors.

## Resources and further reading

### Guidelines

RACGP. Guidelines for preventive care in general practice: [www.racgp.org.au/document.asp?id=4169](http://www.racgp.org.au/document.asp?id=4169)

Chronic condition self management guidelines (2002): [www.racgp.org.au/document.asp?id=611](http://www.racgp.org.au/document.asp?id=611)

RACGP. Handbook for the management of health information in private medical practice:

[www.racgp.org.au/document.asp?id=6528](http://www.racgp.org.au/document.asp?id=6528)

National Heart Foundation and Cardiac Society Lipid guidelines. Risk reduction for patients with or at risk of CVD: [www.heartfoundation.com.au/prof/index\\_fr.html](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au/prof/index_fr.html)

A guide to motivational interviewing – NSW Drug Programs Bureau:

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/dpb/professionals.htm](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/dpb/professionals.htm)

### Smoking

NSW Drug Programs Bureau: A guide to smoking cessation:

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/dpb/professionals.htm](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/dpb/professionals.htm)

National Heart Foundation: Effects of smoking and quitting: [www.heartfoundation.com.au/heart/index\\_fr.html](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au/heart/index_fr.html)

NSW Health Promotion: A guide for management of nicotine dependent patients:

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/healthpromotion/pdf/Tobacco/NicotineDependentInpatient.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/healthpromotion/pdf/Tobacco/NicotineDependentInpatient.pdf)

Zwar N, Richmond R, Borland R. Smoking cessation guidelines for Australian general practice:

[www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/smoking\\_cessation.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/smoking_cessation.pdf)

### Overweight and obesity

NHMRC: Clinical practice guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in adults:

[www.obesityguidelines.gov.au](http://www.obesityguidelines.gov.au)

NHMRC: Clinical practice guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents:

[www.obesityguidelines.gov.au](http://www.obesityguidelines.gov.au)

## **Nutrition**

Dietary guidelines for Australian adults, children and adolescents:

[www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/dietsyn.htm](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/dietsyn.htm)

Dietary guidelines for older Australians (1999): [www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/n23syn.htm](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/n23syn.htm)

Australian guide to healthy eating (1998): [www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/food/guide/index.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/food/guide/index.htm)

Nutrition Australia provides consumer information: [www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org)

Dietitians Association of Australia: [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

## **Alcohol**

The Australian alcohol guidelines: health risks and benefits (2001): [www.alcoholguidelines.gov.au/resources.htm](http://www.alcoholguidelines.gov.au/resources.htm)

Treating alcohol problems: guidelines for general practitioners:

[www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/alc\\_treatinggp.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/alc_treatinggp.pdf)

A guide to the assessment and treatment of alcohol in general practice:

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/dpb/professionals.htm](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/dpb/professionals.htm)

NSW Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre provides resources for the management of alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment for patients of different cultures: [www.damec.org.au](http://www.damec.org.au)

The National Alcohol Strategy: [www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au)

## **Physical activity**

National physical activity guidelines for Australians: [www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/physguide.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/physguide.pdf)

National Heart Foundation physical activity guidelines: [www.heartfoundation.com.au/prof/index\\_fr.html](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au/prof/index_fr.html)

The GP Physical Activity Project newsletter 'Getting Australia active': [www.nphp.gov.au/sigpah](http://www.nphp.gov.au/sigpah)