

Treating Hypertension in Long Term Care: Communicating Medication Changes to Families

Resident: _____

Dear Family Member,

This letter introduces a new initiative to provide optimal treatment for high blood pressure at Saint Vincent's Nursing Home.

High blood pressure is a common problem in adults and can be associated with other health conditions such as heart problems or stroke. As people age, they often accumulate long term health problems, which together, are known as "frailty". Frailty plays an important role in everyday quality of life and function. Frailty makes people more vulnerable to side effects from medications, and also means they may not benefit from treatment in the same way that people who are not frail do. You can find more information about frailty at www.pathclinic.ca. Traditional guidelines help doctors treat blood pressure, but do not take frailty into account.

Recently, the Dalhousie Academic Detailing Service reviewed all the medical literature concerning blood pressure and frailty to come up with guidelines to help doctors treat blood pressure in frail older adults. In general the guidelines recommend a less aggressive approach to treating blood pressure, because the benefits of treatment take many years, but the side effects are always present.

The guidelines and the complete evidence review can be accessed at http://cme.medicine.dal.ca/ad_resources.htm#Hyper (Issues in Hypertension 2011).

Based on these guidelines:

- The resident's blood pressure is at the appropriate level and no medication changes are needed
- The resident's blood pressure is too low, and we have reduced or discontinued those blood pressure medications that are no longer necessary. We will continue to monitor the resident's blood pressure to see if any medication changes are necessary in the future.
- The resident is showing signs of side effects from blood pressure medications, which can increase the risk of falls. We have therefore reduced or discontinued blood pressure medications that are no longer necessary. We will continue to monitor the resident's blood pressure to see if any medication changes are necessary in the future.
- The resident's blood pressure is too high, even considering frailty, and therefore a new medication has been started.

Please contact the nursing station with any questions or concerns that you may have.