

MAR 18 2015

Dear Peer Colleague:

Heart disease is responsible for one of every three deaths in the country¹, and people living with mental and substance use disorders have a higher rate of uncontrolled (but modifiable) risk factors, such as cigarette smoking, obesity, diabetes, elevated cholesterol and hypertension (high blood pressure).² In an effort to address this major health care disparity among those living with mental and substance use disorders, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has joined the collaborative efforts of the national Million Hearts initiative.

Million Hearts is a national initiative that has set an ambitious goal of preventing one million heart attacks and strokes by 2017. Million Hearts aims to prevent heart disease and stroke by:

- Improving access to effective care;
- Improving the quality of care in implementing changes to cardiovascular-related risk factors that impact our overall heart health;
- Focusing our peer support and wellness activities to include the prevention of heart attack and stroke;
- Activating communities to lead a heart-healthy lifestyle; and,
- Improving shared decision making about treatments and prescription medications.

One major modifiable risk factor that can be readily addressed is high blood pressure (hypertension). One in three Americans (72 million) have hypertension, and almost half remain uncontrolled and are at risk for *preventable* heart attack, stroke, and kidney and heart failure. Of the 35 million people with uncontrolled high blood pressure (hypertension), 13 million are unaware they have it, and another 17 million are aware, but remain untreated.³ Moreover, individuals with mental and substance use disorders are more likely to have uncontrolled hypertension⁴ and cardiovascular disease.⁵

We have learned that the use of an evidence-based blood pressure protocol saves lives and we encourage clinicians to utilize one of the approved protocols listed at <http://millionhearts.hhs.gov/resources/protocols.html>.

¹ HHS Million Hearts Consumer Fact Sheet

² http://www2.nami.org/Template.cfm?section=Hearts_and_Minds

³ <http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/>

⁴ <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/284461.php>

⁵ Benjamin G. Druss, MD, MPH, et al. (2011). Understanding Excess Mortality in Persons With Mental Illness. *Medical Care*, Volume 49, Number 6.

As peers, you can help those you serve by:

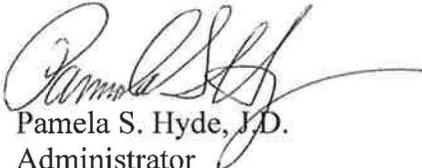
1. Providing education about the impact of high blood pressure;
2. Encouraging peers to ask their provider if they are using one of the three evidence based protocols;
3. Providing education about self- monitoring; and
4. Providing education and supporting lifestyle modifications, such as the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating program, which provides guidelines for eating a heart-healthy diet and includes suggestions for reductions in sodium intake and alcohol consumption. It also includes engaging in physical activities that can lead to weight loss. Altogether, these lifestyle changes could lead to reduction in blood pressure.

Thus, in accordance with the overall goals of the Million Hearts initiative, SAMHSA strongly encourages your continued vigilance in addressing this major health care disparity that currently affects the quality of care for those with mental and substance use disorders.

To learn more about SAMHSA’s Million Hearts initiative and suggested protocols, please visit www.samhsa.gov/million-hearts. For more information about practical tips to increase heart health and overall wellness, please visit www.samhsa.gov/wellness.

If you need additional information, please feel free to contact Keris Myrick, MBA, MS., at Keris.Myrick@samhsa.hhs.gov.

Sincerely,



Pamela S. Hyde, J.D.
Administrator