Weights reduction in the management of hypertension

Sir,
Croft and colleagues have shown the importance of weight reduction in the management of hypertension (October Journal, p.445). In the clinics of the Kupat Holim Sick Fund in Israel hypertension follow-up clinics are run by practice nurses. Hypertensive patients are seen monthly and all aspects of their treatment are reviewed, including their weight. In a retrospective study of nine of these clinics in the Netanya area it was demonstrated that over 50% of the patients lost over 3 kg and maintained that weight reduction for the three years of the study (Table 1).

The nurses work in consultation with the doctors but without the assistance of a dietitian and they use protocol type diet sheets as well as weighing the patients monthly.

Table 1. Percentage of patients losing weight (initial n = 132, 2% drop-out after three years).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight reduction (kg)</th>
<th>3–5.9</th>
<th>6+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After one year</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After two years</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After three years</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>54.6</td>
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</table>

Reisen and colleagues found that each kilogram of weight loss was associated with an approximate drop in diastolic and systolic blood pressure of 3 mmHg. Thus the weight losses achieved in the Netanya study were of an order of magnitude which could make drug treatment unnecessary.

We attribute the success of weight reduction at our hypertension clinics to the persistence of the nurses and doctors and to the community based approach employed, all primary care activities being carried out in the same clinic.

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References

Can general practitioners teach other general practitioners?

Sir,
Although many postgraduate lectures to general practitioners are given by ‘experts’, attendance at these lectures has not been shown to alter the way people work. A topic review presented by another general practitioner who has a special interest in the subject will have more relevance to general practice, and can also provide an opportunity for peer review.

One of us (I.F.) presented a lunchtime postgraduate education lecture entitled 'Terminal care in general practice'. We wanted to ascertain whether the key points of the lecture had been appropriately targeted to the audience's practical problems. Of 30 attenders, the 19 general practitioners who had signed the attendance register legibly were contacted by telephone less than one week after the lecture. An independent researcher (R.B.) discussed a short standard questionnaire with them about the lecture, to ascertain whether they had found the lecture useful and if they were currently practising the key points.

Eighteen general practitioners answered questions: the majority (16) had found the lecture useful (13) or very useful (3); one 'did not learn much' and one found it 'no use'.

Knowledge of drug use varied widely (Table 2). All attenders appeared confident in prescribing morphine sulphate tablets Continus (Napp), but one-third were unaware of the use of morphine to control dyspnoea from lung secondaries and only two general practitioners were aware that haloperidol was an antiemetic that could be prescribed 12-hourly. The use of laxatives to prevent constipation, or even bowel obstruction in patients with bowel tumours, was a new concept to one-third of general practitioners. Half of the doctors knew that dexamethasone in high doses could reduce raised intracranial pressure from secondaries, but did not use it in practice. The role of the domiciliary physiotherapist for intermittent limb-sleeve compression (Flowtron) therapy was unknown to 14 general practitioners.

The lecture was deemed 'useful' by the majority of the attenders and had introduced new concepts to those present. The general practitioner who thought the lecture to be of 'no use' went on to state he had learned three specific new concepts; the general practitioner who felt the lecturer had not taught him much new information, learned two new concepts from it.