

General practitioners' perception of hypertension

RESEARCH GROUP OF THE EAST OF IRELAND FACULTY OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN*

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SUMMARY. As part of a study to determine the prevalence of microscopic haematuria in hypertensive patients, 12 doctors were asked to record pre-treatment levels of blood pressure. Analysis of 163 recordings of systolic and 192 recordings of diastolic pressure demonstrated: marked zero preference; point V, the point of disappearance of sounds, as the more commonly used diastolic end point; and marked clustering of diastolic readings at 110 mmHg. The last finding suggests that this reading accompanies the decision to treat.

Introduction

IN 1980 Kapoor and colleagues reported that some 20 per cent of hypertensives seen in hospital practice had microscopic haematuria (Kapoor *et al.*, 1980). The Research Group of the East of Ireland Faculty decided to find out if the same was true of a population of hypertensive patients in general practice (Ryan, 1981). Twelve doctors took part in the study. The protocol required the doctors to record the pre-treatment levels of blood pressure of the hypertensive patients. Readings, presumably derived from patient records, were available for 163 patients then under treatment for hypertension.

Results

Systolic pressure

The 163 readings for systolic pressure showed a marked preference for zero, which becomes more obvious at

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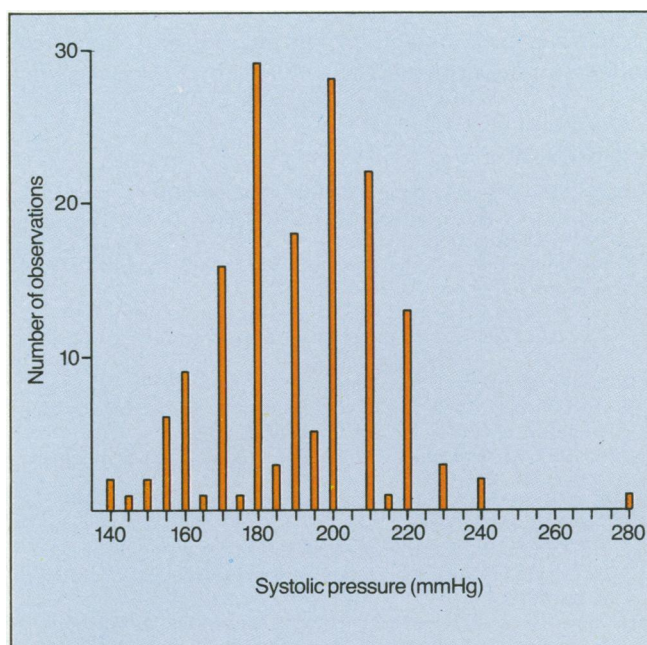


Figure 1. Systolic pressure.

high levels (Table 1 and Figure 1). One hundred and ninety was recorded less often than either 180 or 200.

Diastolic pressure

The protocol allowed the entry of readings taken at both IVth ('muffling') and Vth (disappearance) points. While a few doctors (three out of 12) frequently recorded both, thus making available 192 readings in the 163 patients, the majority (nine) preferred the point of disappearance of sounds.

Zero preference was again strongly marked. The most surprising finding was the extraordinary number of readings at 110 mmHg (Table 2 and Figure 2).

Table 1. Systolic pressure.

140	150	160	170	180	190	200	210	220	230	240	280	Total											
2	1	2	6*	9	1	16	1	29	3	18	5	28	—	22	1	13	—	3	—	2	1	163

*All contributed by one doctor.
Zero preference: 145/163 (89 per cent).

Table 2. Diastolic pressure.

80	90	100	110	120	130	140	150	160	Total								
2	1	1	2	20	21	68	27	34	4	4	—	4	—	1	—	3	192

Zero preference: 136/192 (71 per cent). Non-zeros: 40/56, either 5 or 6.

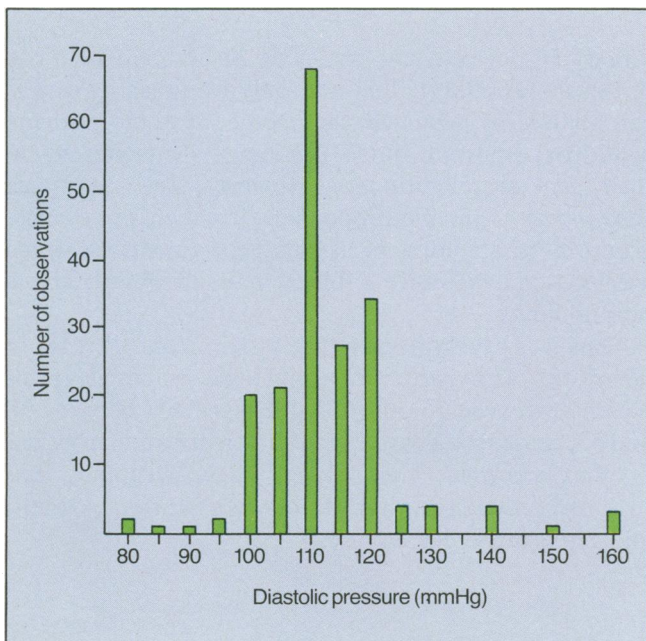


Figure 2. Diastolic pressure.

Discussion

The advantage of this study was that the findings reported here are peripheral to the main objective and are not coloured by the necessity to take and record blood pressure for research purposes.

The findings suggest that general practitioners see little use in trying to record blood pressure any more accurately than to the nearest 10 mmHg. Such a pragmatic decision may be reasonable in view of the diurnal and moment-to-moment variation which occurs in the individual subject. It does not, however, account for the preference for 110 mmHg as diastolic pressure. This suggests that a decision to treat has many dimensions, as it should, and that this decision is justified, *post hoc* rather than *propter hoc*, by a diastolic pressure of 110 mmHg. Others might like to examine their own digit preferences.

References

Kapoor, A., Mowbray, J. F., Porter, K. A. *et al.* (1980). Significance of haematuria in hypertensive patients. *Lancet*, 1, 231.
 Ryan, W. A. (1981). Microscopic haematuria in hypertension. *Lancet*, 2, 994.

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Words our patients use

- ‘Pinkie’—fifth finger (Scotland).
- ‘Hench’—hip region (Scotland).
- ‘Lisk’—groin (Scotland).
- ‘Oxter’—axilla (Scotland).
- ‘Thrapple’—throat or thyroid cartilage (Scotland).
- ‘Bet’—unwell (of a part of the body) (Tyneside).
- ‘Poleaxed’—in a deep sleep, comatose (Tyneside).
- ‘Weeish’—odd taste in mouth (Tyneside).
- ‘Pap o’ ya’ ass’—uvula (Tyneside).
- ‘Lear’—weak and empty with hunger: “I feel lear” (Berkshire).
- ‘Quilt’—to swallow: “My throat was so sore I couldn’t quilt” (Berkshire).
- ‘A box of birds’—recovered from an illness (New Zealand).
- ‘As good as gold’—well, *not* of good behaviour (New Zealand).
- “I want putting in a bag and shaking up”—(self-deprecatingly)—I feel really out of sorts (South Yorkshire).