2014 NICE cholesterol guidelines

Ueda and colleagues address the 2014 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines based on QRISK2 in commendable fashion.¹ It would be interesting to ask them for their opinion on an article very recently published in the Pharmaceutical Journal entitled 'The cholesterol and calorie hypotheses are both dead — it is time to focus on the real culprit: insulin resistance'.² which would appear to undermine the very foundations on which QRISK and the NICE guidelines totter.

Not only is there an issue of whether the patient in the consulting room meets the inclusion criteria of the studies that went towards the formulation of any guideline, but also the semantics involved in the word ‘guideline’, which is fundamentally different from ‘code’ [must do]. [Definition of CODE: a collection or compendium of laws. A complete system of positive law, scientifically arranged, and promulgated by legislative authority].

What is a poor jobbing GP to do in a 10-minute consultation? When the patient sitting opposite is still worrying about what their cholesterol level is, and the GP is grappling with the far more important QRISK2 odds concept, while empirical science puts cholesterol in the dustbin alongside the multitude of historical medical fashions that in their time were cutting-edge ‘must do’s’?

‘Primum non nocere’ would suggest sitting on one’s hands as one of the safest of options while prescribing a statin among the most dangerous!

In conversation with our local community geriatrician it became evident that the scientific evidence and data were not within their grasp to offer a cogent response.

Will the BJGP step up to the mark with its plethora of professorial wisdom and knowledge to enlighten us on this matter, please?

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Time to revive the GP-focused clinical examination

We read with interest Block and Easton’s plea that we should claim the focused examination as a specialist GP skill that we can be proud of.¹

GP teachers who provide clinical placements for Keele’s undergraduate medical students report informally that students sometimes question their practice of performing focused rather than full, systematic ‘PACES-style’ examinations, and as a consequence they lack confidence in teaching examination skills. Conversely, students often question the need to examine patients when so much imaging is available, and is requested, in hospitals.

We have begun to try to address these problems. We have developed a workshop entitled ‘Learning and Teaching the Skills of Evidence Based Physical Examination (EBPE)’ for clinical teachers. This provides participants the opportunity to consider the evidence for the use of focused examinations in their day-to-day work, as well as the practical aspects of teaching evidence-based physical examination.² We have delivered this locally to our GP teachers and to a multidisciplinary audience at the 7th International Clinical Skills Conference in Prato, 2017. Informal feedback has suggested that the workshop has increased participants’ confidence in their examinations in their clinical practice, and in their teaching.

Alongside this, Keele’s Year 4 students have a 4-week general practice-based course on clinical reasoning that promotes focused examination to test diagnostic hypotheses, which they are taught to generate consciously during history taking.³ ⁴ We hope that our graduates will build on this learning and become confident that their examinations accurately inform the decisions they need to make for individual patients in whatever clinical setting they are working in.

We believe that our work is helping to highlight this important area of practice, teaching, and learning to both students and their GP teachers, and wholeheartedly agree