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Improving Secondary Prevention for Cardiovascular Patients



PARTNERSHIP TO ADVANCE

**Cardiovascular
Health**

Overview

Each year, more than 800,000 Americans suffer from a heart attack. And for nearly one-third of them, it's a repeat occurrence.¹



Once a patient has a heart attack, the risk for having another heart attack rises. Of those who suffer a heart attack, one in five will face another cardiovascular event within five years.²

To explore the needs of patients after a cardiovascular event, the Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health held “The Patient Pathway,” a virtual discussion, in May 2021. The event welcomed cardiologists, clinicians, heart attack survivors and fellow stakeholders.

Unmet Needs

The discussion uncovered six major needs.



Greater Awareness

Many heart attack survivors never expect to endure a heart attack themselves. Even with knowledge of family history, patients want to believe it couldn't happen to them and therefore do not take preventive steps. Expanding public awareness and education can encourage at-risk patients to be proactive about their heart health.

“ I was aware of my family’s history with heart issues, but still never considered I would have a heart attack at 36 years old.”



Chad Witheridge
Heart Attack Survivor



Patient Empowerment

Patients should feel confident and empowered enough to be their own advocates, but additional support is key for optimal recovery. Patients can be scared and often overwhelmed in the hospital after a cardiovascular event. Having a family member or friend as an advocate alongside them will help equip patients to navigate their recovery journey.



Sapana Shah, MD
Emergency Medicine Physician

“ Having a family member who can speak on the patient’s behalf, take notes and ask questions can help ensure the patient is receiving optimal care.”



Risk Factor Mitigation

Exercising, eating a healthy diet and not smoking are all primary prevention steps patients can take to reduce their risk of having a first heart attack.

Once a patient has had a heart attack, however, additional interventions like medication or cardiac rehabilitation become a necessity. Failure to address modifiable risk factors like high cholesterol, for example, will only lead to secondary events.

“ Many clinicians don’t understand that, by lowering cholesterol levels, we are actually preventing future cardiac events.”



Seth J. Baum, MD
Cardiologist



Team-Based Care

A patient who just had a heart attack may see 10-12 clinicians before leaving the hospital. The experience can be overwhelming. Providers have the responsibility to effectively communicate to their patient what has occurred and what is being asked of them after their cardiovascular event.

Additionally, having an open dialogue between patients, cardiologists and specialists such as diabetes specialists and dieticians benefits everyone. A team-based approach to care will help ensure providers are all on the same page and that the patient receives the best care possible.



Lisa Maher, DNP
Nurse Practitioner

“ Primary and specialty care providers need to know who is responsible for what, and how we can best work together to reduce cardiovascular risk.”





Medication Adherence

Heart attack survivors with additional comorbidities can end up taking 10 or more medications. The more medicines patients are responsible for taking, the more difficult it can be for patients to stay adherent to their regimen.

Pill fatigue can make it difficult for patients to stick with their medications. Also, health plans can get in the way when they non-medically switch medications or require a step therapy protocol. Heart disease is treatable, but only if patients adhere to their medication regimen.

“ I tell my patients: If you work with me and take your medicine responsibly, I can almost guarantee you will never experience a heart attack ever again.”



Dharmesh Patel, MD
Cardiologist



Patient Education

“Around 30%-40% of patients think they are ‘cured’ after their initial ER visit following a heart attack,” reflected cardiologist Dharmesh Patel, MD.

The misperception presents a teaching opportunity for providers, who must educate patients about long-term lifestyle changes. The information is best conveyed simply and in laymen’s terms.

By also providing educational resources, providers can ensure that patients understand what is at stake.

“Putting patient-friendly educational materials in doctors’ offices where patients can look at it, read it and take it home with them can help increase the public’s education,” said Seth J. Baum, MD.

Conclusion

With greater awareness and aggressive treatment, patients can prevent secondary events from happening. The value of prevention is priceless, and it's never too early to start.

To learn more, visit [AdvanceCardioHealth.org](https://www.advancecardiohealth.org).

References

1. *What Are the Odds of Having a Second Heart Attack?* February 4, 2021. *healthgrades*. Available from: <https://www.healthgrades.com/right-care/heart-attack/what-are-the-odds-of-having-a-second-heart-attack>
2. *Proactive steps can reduce chances of the next heart attack.* April 4, 2019. *American Heart Association News*. Available from: <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2019/04/04/proactive-steps-can-reduce-chances-of-second-heart-attack>



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About the Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health

The Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health works to advance public policies and practices that result in more treatment options and improved cardiovascular health for heart patients around the world.



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