

# Clinic Visits Following Patient Newsletter Discussing Cardiovascular Risks

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Medical studies directed at the impact of informational mailings to patients are few. Mailed reminders, in an attempt to reduce broken appointments, have been studied,<sup>1-5</sup> and letters to promote influenza vaccination compliance have been shown to have limited success.<sup>6-8</sup> Newsletters have been promoted as a marketing technique to increase patient visits.<sup>9,10</sup> This study was designed to measure the number and content of clinic visits by men following an educational letter explaining cardiovascular risks and possible corrective measures.

## METHODS

An intervention study was conducted at the University of Washington Family Medical Center. A computerized registry was used to obtain a list of 660 male patients aged 24 to 49 years who had not been seen in the previous eight and one-half months but had been seen in the past two years. Two hundred ten study patients and 220 control patients were randomly selected from the initial list. The mean age was 33 years and the age range was 24 to 49 years for both the study and control groups. An educational newsletter explaining cardiovascular risk factors, screening evaluations, and risk-reduction measures was devised. The newsletter, which focused on smoking, blood pressure, exercise, and diet, was mailed to the 210 study patients. The clinic telephone number was included on the newsletter, but no statements explicitly encouraging patients to come to the clinic were included. After three months the charts of the two groups of patients were reviewed noting the number of visits, blood pressure measurements, and physicians' comments regarding smoking, exercise, and diet. The patients were not contacted further.

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## RESULTS

In the three months following the receipt of the newsletter, 9.5 percent (20 of 210) of the study group made an appointment, compared with 12.3 percent (27 of 220) of the control group. Blood pressure was measured in 20 patients a total of 25 times in the study group, and in 23 patients a total of 28 times in the control group. Those making an appointment had a mean age of 34 years (range 25 to 47 years) in the study group, and 33 years (range 25 to 45 years) in the control group. Smoking, exercise, or diet was noted in the medical record of the study patients nine times, and in the control group 13 times. None of the differences between the study and control group were significant using the Z test for differences between proportions. Not one patient in either group was noted to have initiated blood pressure medications, started a smoking-cessation program, started an exercise program, or made a dietary change.

## COMMENT

A newsletter to young and middle-aged men did not result in increased number of visits to the practice and did not result in an increase in chart documentation of attention to cardiovascular risk factors. There was no documentation of initiation of specific therapy in any of these areas. It is not known whether the newsletter resulted in a more knowledgeable or loyal patient population. Further study is needed to clarify whether educational mailings are effective in patient care.

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