



**Prescribing statins is unfocused and as a result many patients are missing out on treatment**

## **Most statins prescribed to the wrong patients**

### **Background**

- Statins are highly effective treatments for the prevention of heart disease. Guidelines recommend the use of statins in patients who are at high risk of developing heart disease.
- Patients who do not have heart disease, but are classified as 'high-risk' – patients who are older, smoke, have diabetes, higher blood pressure and cholesterol levels – should be recommended statins.
- Statins are not recommended for patients classified as low-risk – generally younger people who are in good health.
- However, it is not known to what extent GPs follow guidelines in routine clinical practice and what influences their prescribing decisions.

## Findings

- This research analysed 365,718 patient records from 421 general practices in the UK focusing on patients who did not already have heart disease.
- The records showed that only 3 in 10 high-risk patients were started on statins. Most high-risk patients missed out on treatment despite the fact that the average patient would have consulted their GP eleven times over the two year study period.
- At the same time, 1 in 10 low-risk patients were started on treatment, meaning that many were over-treated.
- During this period, over 50,000 patients were started on statins, but only 21,000 (42%) could be thought of as high-risk.
- Patients aged over 65 years, those with diabetes, and those who consulted their GP more frequently were more likely to be started on statins

## What are we doing about it?

- We have instigated a computer recall system for high-risk patients, which is being evaluated in a step-wedge cluster trial. The results will be reported in 2014.

## Reference

Wu J, Zhu S, Yao GL, Mohammed MA, Marshall T. Patient Factors Influencing the Prescribing of Lipid Lowering Drugs for Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease in UK General Practice: A National Retrospective Cohort Study. *PLoS One*. 2013; **8**(7): e67611. [[Link](#)].



## Recommendations for practice

There needs to be greater awareness and understanding of clinical guidelines, as they are not translating into prescribing behaviour. Prescribing statins is very unfocused. While some of the right patients are getting treatment, many are missing out. At the same time many of the wrong patients are started on treatment.

### What is NIHR CLAHRC West Midlands?

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