

Addressing High Blood Pressure Inequities Among Korean Americans

A John Hopkins' study found that Korean Americans experience higher rates of hypertension than other Americans or Korean individuals living in Korea¹. The research indicated that many factors contribute to this disparity, including language barriers, a lack of culturally congruent medical care and lower awareness of risk factors. When left unmanaged, high blood pressure greatly increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Advanced FamilyCare Medicine in Lakewood, Washington is working to shift this paradigm by providing linguistically and culturally appropriate care to their patients, many of which identify as Korean American. Their mission is to provide "advanced, accurate and affordable healthcare for all ages."

Dr. Junghee "Julie" Che, DNP, who runs the clinic, was motivated to pursue a career in medicine after realizing that many Korean Americans lacked equitable access to medical care. "When I moved from Korea 20 years ago, I noticed many Korean Americans were hesitant to seek care for their health concerns due to language barriers and the high cost of medical care without health insurance," said Dr. Che.

To help bridge the gap in blood pressure management among Korean American communities, the American Heart Association collaborated with Advanced FamilyCare Medicine to integrate a self-monitoring blood pressure (SMBP) program into their service offerings. The SMBP program launched in August 2022 and equips patients to control their high blood pressure at home and connect with providers for follow up care.

While Advanced FamilyCare Medicine's demonstration to quality patient care is evident through their participation in the American Heart Association's Target: BP program, the self-monitoring component reaches more patients with the tools and education to keep their blood pressure numbers in a healthy range.

"The healthcare landscape has improved in recent years. More Korean Americans have health insurance and most major health systems offer interpreter services. But there are still challenges. Previously, when we instructed patients to monitor their blood pressure at home, some of them couldn't due to the cost of a blood pressure monitor," said Edward, Medical Assistant at Advanced FamilyCare Medicine. "Now that we can lend patients blood pressure monitors for home use, patients are more likely to track and report their numbers during their follow up visit. This translates to better patient outcomes," Dr. Che continued.

To account for barriers that may prevent individuals from regularly monitoring their blood pressure, including transportation or inability to afford a blood pressure device, the American Heart Association provided validated blood pressure devices for use during the duration of patients' one-month self-monitoring program. The patients' blood pressure readings are logged into their health record to help providers strategize next steps according to their results.

Advanced FamilyCare Medicine utilized Target: BP resources to design their self-monitoring program and ensure their team was trained on effective SMBP technique and application. To educate and train participating patients, they utilize resources from the Association and Washington Department of Health such as blood pressure logs and materials that provide guidance on how to measure blood pressure accurately, understand blood pressure readings and make lifestyle changes to lower high blood pressure. The American Heart Association's translated resources in Korean have been instrumental to ensuring the information is accessible and culturally appropriate.

With a care team primarily comprised of providers with Korean heritage, Advanced FamilyCare Medicine's cultural expertise and lived experiences uniquely position them to provide effective, community-informed prevention and treatment strategies for cardiovascular disease risk factors like high blood pressure.