Comment on “Under-use of secondary prevention medication” article by Looi and colleagues

The figures quoted by Khang L Looi et al for secondary prevention medication in patients who have had coronary artery bypass graft surgery do indeed look unnecessarilly low. From a general practice point of view there are many reasons why patients may not be on long-term medication as recommended by a specialist, including intolerance, problems of polypharmacy and patient preference. However it is certainly possible to achieve better results with a close attention to chronic disease management in primary care.

For comparison, we undertook an audit last year in our Very Low Cost Access practice, which serves a relatively deprived population in East Christchurch. Of 185 patients with a recorded diagnosis of ischaemic heart disease, 153 (83%) were taking both aspirin and a statin.

Ten patients (5.4%) were not taking aspirin and adequate clinical reasons for this were recorded for seven, one patient had declined and no reason was found for two patients.

Twenty-three patients (12.4%) were not taking a statin of which ten patients were recorded as intolerant, ten had significant co-morbidities or other clinical reasons and two had declined. Only in one patient could no reason be found.

Thus there were only three patients out of 185 where the lack of aspirin or statin prescription may have resulted from accidental omission, the failure for some reason to follow best practice or failure to record appropriate decisions.

This demonstrates that whatever the situation as regards hospital prescribing, it is possible to achieve good results through attention in primary care. We do not know whether the Auckland results indicate that patients are being discharged without having a GP to follow them up—this may explain some of the low figures. However it is also important to point out that a proportion of patients (in our practice 18%) will have good reasons for not taking their long-term prophylactic medication as recommended.

Pat McIntosh
General Practitioner
Christchurch

Reference: