Helping Fire Fighters Control High Blood Pressure

Information for fire department physicians/fire surgeons and primary care physicians about the risks and consequences of high blood pressure among professional fire fighters

www.iaff.org/hs/fts

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The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) has collaborated with Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation to develop the **STOP•DROP•CONTROL High Blood Pressure™ (HBP)** program.

This program, which is consistent with the goals of the IAFF Wellness-Fitness Initiative, is designed for fire fighters and their families, their fire department physicians/fire surgeons, primary care physicians, and members of their communities.

This initiative is an opportunity to improve:

- Blood pressure awareness
- General health
- Safety
- Employability
Facts about high blood pressure and fire fighters...

44 percent of on-duty deaths in fire fighters are due to cardiac arrest or heart attack\(^1\)

74 percent of fire fighters with high blood pressure do not have their blood pressure adequately controlled\(^2\)

Questions? Call 1-877-352-6474 EXT 29111, e-mail stop.dropcontrol@novartis.com or visit www.iaff.org/hs/fts for program details.
Discuss the long-term consequences of uncontrolled high blood pressure with your patients who are fire fighters.

If left untreated, high blood pressure may cause stroke or heart attack.

Emphasize that high blood pressure is easy to diagnose and measure.

There are a lot of ways they can help control it, including:

- Changing their diet and eating healthy foods
- Exercising and participating in physical activities
- Managing their weight
- Limiting their consumption of alcoholic beverages (2 drinks per day for men; 1 drink per day for women)
- Taking medication(s) to control hypertension, if necessary
Points to discuss with fire fighters/patients regarding high blood pressure:

1. Discuss their work as a professional fire fighter and determine a blood pressure level that is healthy for them.
2. Explain how they can measure and keep track of their own blood pressure at home.
3. Ask about any medicines they are taking—including over-the-counter products for common conditions like colds or allergies.
4. Talk about their special type of work and lifestyle and any changes they may have to make such as reducing caffeine, salt, and alcohol use, losing weight, and increasing activity or exercise.
5. Talk about the medications available to help treat patients with high blood pressure. Also discuss how an antihypertensive medication may affect them, their work, and their daily lifestyle.

Be prepared for questions patients may have about antihypertensive medicines, including:
- Will they affect my energy level, sleep, alertness, weight, nerves, bathroom needs, or sex life?
- What about my appetite, social life, work, or free-time activities?
- What if I miss a dose?
- How do they react with foods or other medicines I might be taking?

Remind them that high blood pressure can be controlled, and that it is much better to diagnose and treat it before it becomes a more serious problem.

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Issues to discuss with your patients who are fire fighters when they have their blood pressure measured

1. Talk about the risk factors for high blood pressure: age, gender, race, weight gain, alcohol consumption, and their family history of high blood pressure. If appropriate, consider other tests for cardiovascular disease risk factors (eg, lipid levels, blood glucose levels).

2. Remember that fire fighters should use agents that minimize clinical side effects that may impair their job performance. Agents that predispose patients to precipitous declines in blood pressure, syncope, fatigue, or excessive electrolyte shifts should be avoided.

   The patient should also be made aware of potential drug interactions their medication(s) may have with other drugs and/or alcohol.

3. Discuss a complete treatment plan. Make sure it is one that the patient can follow and that they know their responsibilities—particularly the importance of compliance with their regimen.

Patient Resources

The following resources are available to you through the STOP • DROP • CONTROL HBP program:

- **Patient Chart Stickers** for use on patient files who are fire fighters. These Chart Stickers make it easy to identify the patient.

  For electronic systems, input wording of the sticker into the patient’s e-file so the same “prompt” appears.

- **Hypertension Dialogues Flip Chart** to assist you or your staff with hypertension education, awareness, and control discussions with fire fighter patients.

- **Hypertension Tear Sheet** to give to fire fighter patients as a record for their most recent blood pressure reading and any appropriate notes.
Thank you for taking part in the **STOP • DROP • CONTROL HBP** program!

Your care of patients who are professional fire fighters is critical in keeping these workers healthy and actively serving your community.

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References: