How do health professionals communicate risk during cardiovascular disease screening consultations?

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BACKGROUND AND AIM: Psoriasis is associated with risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD) which are linked to lifestyle factors. Knowledge about their own CVD risk is important for patients who may need to make lifestyle changes to reduce that risk. Communicating information about risk remains a challenge for health professionals and little is known about the specific methods used during CVD screening consultations. We examined current methods of risk communication used by primary care practitioners when undertaking CVD screening consultations.

METHODS: CVD risk screening consultations (n=44) between practitioners and patients with psoriasis across 10 primary care practices in NW England were audio-recorded and analysed using content analysis. A coding frame was designed to record specific techniques used to communicate CVD risk.

RESULTS: Practitioners favoured combining verbal descriptors with numerical expressions of risk communication (n=27), over verbal descriptors alone (n=15). No examples of numerical risk communication methods alone were found. Only two participants were given personalised risk calculations. Risk information was commonly presented solely as a blood pressure reading (n=17). Risk communication was rarely followed by discussions about lifestyle changes to reduce risk (n=25).

CONCLUSION: There was little consistency in how CVD risk information was communicated to patients. Given the current literature suggests a conflict in preferred methods of risk communication between practitioners and patients, further research should examine the most optimal methods for communicating information about CVD risk to improve patients’ perception of risk.