How is cardiovascular risk conceptualised in the context of psoriasis? A qualitative exploration of healthcare practitioners’ views

A. Chisholm¹, K. Kane¹, P.A. Nelson¹, C.J. Pearce¹, C. Keyworth¹, C.A. Chew-Graham², C.E.M. Griffiths¹,³, L Cordingley¹,⁴

Affiliations:
¹Manchester Centre for Dermatology Research, Institute of Inflammation and Repair, University of Manchester, ²Research Institute, Primary Care and Health Sciences, Keele University, Keele, UK, ³Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, ⁴Manchester Centre for Health Psychology University of Manchester, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, Manchester, UK

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BACKGROUND: People with psoriasis may engage in unhealthy behaviours which put them at risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD). Complex relationships exist between these behaviours and patients’ mood, self-management and onset/exacerbation of psoriasis. Practitioners are expected to address unhealthy lifestyle behaviours as part of psoriasis management but often do not. It is unknown in the context of psoriasis, how practitioners interpret CVD risk factors and explain them to patients.

OBJECTIVE: Identify how healthcare practitioners convey CVD risk in the context of psoriasis.

METHODS: Semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 primary care practitioners who previously audio-recorded consultations with psoriasis patients about CVD risk. Stimulated-recall facilitated discussion of 49 consultations during practitioner interviews. Thematic analysis of the data conducted. Additionally, descriptive quantitative data was independently extracted to create an objective risk profile for each patient.

RESULTS: Four key themes regarding practitioners’ views towards CVD risk emerged: 1) High but only a bit high: risk factors were identified but frequently downplayed. 2) Putting it into perspective: practitioners drew attention away from identified risk factors by emphasising less problematic risk factors/contexts. 3) One score is not enough: risk-indicating scores (e.g. high blood pressure) were not seen to warrant preventive discussion about risk. 4) Normalisation of common risk factors: personal perceptions/experiences informed risk interpretations.

CONCLUSION: Practitioners often minimised CVD risk in discussions with patients with psoriasis, and failed to recognise the value in engaging preventive discussions. Practitioner training should take into account this specific barrier to risk discussions in the context of psoriasis.