

Gout point-of-care testing in pharmacy

Unlock new opportunities for your pharmacy by offering point-of-care (POC) testing for gout and uric acid. POC testing streamlines gout management, benefiting your community and your pharmacy's bottom line.

Introduction

Gout, often characterised by excruciating joint pain and swelling, affects a substantial portion of our population. Managing this painful form of arthritis is crucial not only for the patients' quality of life but also for their long-term health outcomes. Unfortunately, gout is often misunderstood and poorly managed in our communities, leading to significant healthcare burdens such as cardiovascular complications and reduced life expectancy.

Implementing point-of-care (POC) testing for gout and uric acid in community pharmacies can benefit both the community and the profitability of pharmacies.

A study revealed that, for New Zealanders aged 20-79 years with gout, 57% were dispensed allopurinol in 2010/11. Of these, 69% were receiving allopurinol regularly, and only 34% of people dispensed allopurinol had serum urate testing in a 6-month period.

Māori and Pacific people with gout were less likely to be on regular allopurinol treatment, despite having more than twice the chance of being hospitalised with acute gout.

Primary care initiatives that focus on ensuring a continuous supply of urate-lowering therapy coupled with regular monitoring to achieve therapeutic serum urate targets are required to improve the impact of gout in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Community pharmacists may have an increasing role not only in identifying patients with increased uric acid levels, but also in the titration of allopurinol dosing with the use of standing orders provided by general practitioners, e.g., in the Owning My Gout and Gout Stop initiatives, click [here](#) for further information.

The power of point-of-care testing

Point of care (POC) testing addresses key barriers by enabling immediate testing and adjustment of medicine dosage during the critical titration phase, monitoring uric acid levels to ensure compliance and prevent gout-related flares, and complimenting diet-related adjustments and improvements. POC testing can be conveniently available in community settings and beyond normal laboratory hours, vastly improving access and reducing time delays and multiple visits to primary care practices.

Community pharmacies are already equipped with POC meters for various purposes, such as checking blood glucose levels. With minimal training, non-clinical staff members can utilise these meters to test uric acid levels. They can promptly report these results to pharmacists, who can then adjust medicine dosages via standing orders where possible, particularly allopurinol or other uric acid-lowering medicines. This approach is especially helpful for marginalised communities, like Māori and Pacific peoples, who may face barriers in accessing other healthcare facilities.

Pharmacies as key players

Pharmacies play a pivotal role in this initiative, with the potential to:

1. **Identify:** Identify patients with gout or at risk of developing it through POC testing (screening).
2. **Test to treat:** Test uric acid levels and initiate/modify treatment options promptly.
3. **Test to monitor:** Continuously monitor uric acid levels to adjust treatment and/or dietary habits as needed.
4. **Manage flares and refer:** Manage acute gout flares and refer patients to other healthcare providers when necessary.

Pharmacies can offer comprehensive care, ensuring patients receive the best advice and treatment. Gout is not just a minor ailment, it can lead to severe complications, including cardiovascular disease, renal failure, and reduced life expectancy. Therefore, early, and effective management is crucial.

Service opportunities and funding

Pharmacies can tap into existing programs like the Community Pharmacy Gout Management Service (CPGMS) to support gout patients. The CPGMS aims to provide better understanding and management of gout medicine, decrease serum urate levels, improve adherence to treatment and lifestyle modification, enhance accessibility, and reduce patient harm through appropriate medicine use.

Funding for these services can be obtained through partnerships with local general practices or Te Whatu Ora Districts. Pharmacies can negotiate contracts to provide these services, either publicly or privately, depending on the community's needs.

If your pharmacy has a high number of patients who suffer from uncontrolled gout, you can discuss this service with your local general practice and if the general practice sees value in this service for their patients, the pharmacy owner or manager can discuss opportunities for a contract to provide this service with your local District Portfolio Manager.

If funding is not possible, the pharmacy could consider providing this service privately, or encouraging patients to buy monitoring devices and manage their serum urate levels appropriately. A breakeven calculator for this service is available on our website.

Serum urate level goal monitoring

The primary goal of urate-lowering treatment is to reduce serum urate levels below the saturation point, dissolving urate crystals and preventing future gout flares. Regular testing of serum urate levels is crucial to ensure patients reach their treatment goals.

Key points

Implementing point-of-care testing for gout and uric acid in community pharmacies holds immense potential to improve gout management in our communities. It offers convenience, accessibility, and prompt treatment adjustment, all of which are crucial in managing this painful condition effectively. Moreover, this initiative benefits not only patients but also pharmacies by expanding their service offerings and fostering collaboration with healthcare providers. Ultimately, it is a win-win situation that can significantly enhance the overall health and wellbeing of our communities.

References and further reading

Community Pharmacy Gout Management Service (CPGMS):

<https://www.psnz.org.nz/practicesupport/pharmacyservices/cpgms>

Standing orders example: <https://goutguide.nz/Partnering-with-community-pharmacy-07d81287013f48c39af984c2441c3e51>

<https://bpac.org.nz/2021/gout-part1.aspx>

<https://bpac.org.nz/2021/gout-part2.aspx>

<https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/gout>

<https://goutguide.nz/Funding-511f68bed88f4e14ae9651fe4d9d1353>

<https://healthify.nz/healthcare-providers/g/gout-hcps/>

<https://healthify.nz/health-a-z/g/gout/>

<https://goutguide.nz/>

<https://www.huttvalleydhb.org.nz/media-and-latest-news/latest-news/2016-01-29-men-maori-and-pacific-people-need-better-gout-medication/>

Self-training resources

Humanses 2.0 video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiHaYF1dU_g

<https://www.uptodate.com/contents/gout-beyond-the-basics>

<https://goutguide.nz/Point-of-care-testing-48bccc334c144dbdb771c6da6c9bdacd>