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Understanding new blood pressure recommendations

Many people are concerned about the new high blood pressure guidelines recently published by the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology.

“The new approach should be seen as a path toward better cardiac health rather than a cause for fear,” according to Dr. Michael Blanc, medical director of San Angelo Community Medical Center’s Heart and Vascular Center.

Under old guidelines formulated in 2003, a normal blood pressure reading was less than 130/80. Under the new guidelines, that blood pressure now is considered stage 1 hypertension (high blood pressure) disease.

“The goal is to get the attention of the 130/80 group and have them focus more on lifestyle changes, diet, exercise and relaxation techniques,” Blanc said.

“In the past, people in 130/80 group believed they had no hypertension problem. Research now shows that is the time to begin addressing hypertension. We want them to avoid having to address the problem with medications.

“For those already on blood pressure medicine, we may be more aggressive, but we also will stress the lifestyle changes and monitoring your cardiac health even more.”

According to Blanc, high blood pressure accounts for the second-largest cause of preventable heart disease and stroke death, second only to smoking. Hypertension is called the “silent killer” because there are no obvious symptoms other than blood pressure readings.

“Heart attack and strokes are the biggest problems caused by hypertension,” Blanc said. “But congenital heart failure and kidney disease are other issues. High blood pressure alone is the cause of one-third of kidney failures. Heart disease is the number one killer of Americans, and the new guidelines are aimed at reducing that number.”

New Hypertension Definitions

- **Normal:** Less than 120/80 mm Hg
- **Elevated:** Top number (systolic) between 120-129 and bottom number (diastolic) less than 80
- **Stage 1 hypertension:** Systolic between 130-139 or diastolic between 80-89
- **Stage 2 hypertension:** Systolic at least 140 or diastolic at least 90 mm Hg
- **Hypertension crisis:** Top number over 180 and/or bottom number over 120, with patients needing prompt changes in medication if there are no other indications of problems, or immediate hospitalization if there are signs of organ damage.

About SACMC

SACMC is a 171-bed general acute care facility providing care to San Angelo and the surrounding area. Designated as a Level III Trauma Center, as well as the areas only accredited chest pain center and accredited heart failure center, SACMC provides extensive heart care to patients in the Concho Valley, including heart surgery. A neonatal intensive care unit and full-time neonatologist provide critical care to newborns 28 weeks and weighing at least 2 lbs, 2 ounces. SACMC offers robotic assisted surgery in urology, gynecology, general surgery and orthopaedics. SACMC is owned in part by physicians. Visit sacmc.com.