Introduction to Cardiac Care
The human heart pumps blood in order to deliver oxygen and nutrients to the rest of the body and remove waste. A strong heart is essential for healthy living. Poor diet, lack of exercise, smoking and stress can lead to heart disease—high cholesterol levels (hyperlipidemia), high blood pressure (hypertension), narrowing of blood vessels, lack of oxygen to the heart (heart attack) and heart failure. Although deaths related to these conditions have recently declined, about 610,000 people die of heart disease every year, which is one in every four deaths.

What a Pharmacist Provides
Pharmacists evaluate and monitor patient’s blood pressure and make treatment recommendations so patients get the most from their medications. The pharmacist’s goal is to ensure patients are placed on the right medications, to simplify complicated drug regimens and to educate patients to help ensure that they adhere to their medication therapy. Since several over-the-counter medications interact with heart disease medications, it is important for pharmacists to educate patients about which products are safe to take and which ones to avoid. Pharmacists help patients prevent heart disease by addressing pertinent lifestyle issues. They educate patients about the importance of avoiding foods high in saturated fat, limiting their salt intake and increasing their level of physical activity, as well as help a patient make these lifestyle changes. Some pharmacists may also draw a sample of the patient’s blood to obtain a lipid profile, which helps assess the patients’ risk for developing heart disease. Since smoking is a major risk factor leading to heart disease, pharmacists help patients quit smoking. Pharmacists identify barriers, habits or situations that may interfere with a patient’s ability to quit smoking, and develop a plan, which frequently includes medications like gums or patches, to overcome those obstacles. Together, the pharmacist and patient establish a target quit date. Pharmacists support patients through follow-up phone calls and face-to-face visits, making adjustments to the original plan as needed and ensuring the patient is using medications appropriately.

In a study, 47 patients were followed over a six-month period. Results showed that increased patient counseling on adherence and lifestyle changes along with increased disease state monitoring and medication adjustment led by a clinical pharmacist can decrease the number of risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD). Statistically significant reductions occurred in the total number of CVD risk factors, systolic and diastolic blood pressures and A1c. Reductions also occurred in LDL level, weight, and changes in smoking behavior and physical activity were identified.