

Heart charity welcomes guideline to improve outcomes for one million people

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- Action to prevent 7,000 AF-related strokes and save 2,100 lives each year in England and Wales
 - Adoption of scoring system to assess patients for their personal risk of AF-related stroke
 - Aspirin (antiplatelet) alone no longer recommended for AF-related stroke prevention
 - Personalised package of care for AF patients
 - Age restrictions lifted on certain procedures to restore quality of life
 - Pulse screening endorsed to support early diagnosis of AF patients

AF Association, 18 June 2014, UK: National heart charity, AF Association, today welcomes the release of the new National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline outlining care and treatment for more than one million AF patients across England and Wales.

AF is the most common heart rhythm disorder (arrhythmia). At the age of 40 we each have a one in four lifetime risk of developing the condition, which carries a 500% increased risk of stroke. AF is the fourth largest single risk factor for stroke, with AF-related strokes among the most deadly and disabling.

The release of today's NICE clinical guideline on the management of AF marks the first update in eight years, and outlines the importance of anticoagulation in AF care and treatment to reduce the risk of AF-related stroke. A Patient Decision Making Aid released alongside the guidelines today will help inform patients about these risks and available treatment options, enabling them to speak at greater length with their doctor. It is also hoped the tool will lead to procedures to treat AF being performed sooner after diagnosis, increasing their effectiveness.

Trudie Lobban, Founder and CEO, AF Association (AFA), said:

"It is imperative that AF is quickly detected, diagnosed and appropriately managed to reduce the high number of preventable AF-related strokes suffered each year in England and Wales.

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"AF Association is committed to supporting these guidelines to make sure all those working in AF care and treatment adhere to them in practice, thus improving outcomes and making sure all have access to the same plan of care.

"I urge anyone who is diagnosed with AF and either solely taking aspirin for AF-stroke prevention, or who have not been assessed for an appropriate anticoagulation therapy, to make an appointment with their doctor to discuss their own risks and the treatment options which can best protect them from AF-related stroke."

AF patient Fiona Birdseye, 60, who suffered an AF-related stroke while on aspirin, said:

"I welcome these new guidelines to hopefully save lives. It will now be easier for GPs to assess patients like myself and make sure they are receiving appropriate treatments to help best protect them from AF-related stroke and reduce their risk.

"For too long aspirin has been perceived as effective in the management of AF-related stroke and associated risks; we know this is not the case for many and I am pleased that the tides are now turning.

"I welcome the first-of-its kind Patient Decision Making Aid to help others with AF structure their thoughts about their care and treatment and share these with their doctor so they have confidence they are receiving care appropriate to their needs."

Eileen Porter, who sat as a patient/carer representative on the Guideline Development Group, said:

"I was fortunate to receive a catheter ablation procedure to restore my quality of life with AF.

"I hope that tools such as the AF Association Care AF package and NICE Patient Decision Making Aid will support others in seeking treatments to help them early on in their care journey, not when it is too late."

Professor Richard Schilling, AF Association Trustee and consultant cardiologist at London Barts Health NHS trust, said:

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“These new guidelines have been long in the planning stage and we are now fully committed to making sure they are disseminated and followed, in an effort to save as many lives as possible from preventable AF-related strokes.

“The guidelines will help patients visualise their care and treatment and thanks to tools released by AF Association they will know how and where to call on support from those working in the field of heart rhythm care.”

For further information please contact AF Association.

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Notes:

- 1) AF Association provides support, information and guidance to anyone affected by atrial fibrillation. It works in partnership with patients and clinical experts to advance the education of both the medical profession and the general public on the risks, detection and treatment of AF.
- 2) The NICE Guidelines can be viewed in full at www.afa.org.uk
- 3) For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact Andrew Robson on 01789 867 527 or email andrew@afa.org.uk
- 4) The AF Association website can be found at www.afa.org.uk