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Heart rhythm experts warn 'undiagnosed AF-related strokes cost NHS up to £14,000 per patient'

Wednesday 18th April 2012, UK: The Atrial Fibrillation Association (AFA) today launched the Global AF Charter at the World Heart Federation, World Congress of Cardiology Scientific Sessions in Dubai, to address the devastating affects of undiagnosed atrial fibrillation (AF) and AF- related strokes.

The first step in tackling the epidemic of AF- related stroke, The Charter and its supporting campaign '*Sign Against Stroke in Atrial Fibrillation*' calls for members of the public and industry professionals to sign in support of the initiative, which hopes to gain 1.7 million signatures - one for each individual killed or disabled by AF-related strokes every year.

Atrial fibrillation is a heart rhythm disorder which causes an irregular and sometimes abnormally fast heart rate, and is the most common heart rhythm disorder in the UK, with one in four Britons affected by the condition.

The disorder knows no bounds and can affect anyone, at any age and most recently took GB rower Tom James by surprise. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair and ex-England rugby player Bill Beaumont also suffer from the condition. If left untreated, AF can cause stroke due to ineffective pumping within the heart, leading to blood pooling and blood clots forming as a result.

As part of a global coalition, The Charter was created by a steering committee of six patient organisations and advocacy groups, including the Atrial Fibrillation Association and its sister charity Arrhythmia Alliance, in collaboration with 39 patient organisations from 20 countries.

With the 1.7 million signatures, the initiative aims to bring a worldwide, unified voice to improving the treatment and care of individuals living with AF, and those at risk of AF-related stroke.

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The Global Charter contains recommendations about critical actions that policy makers, healthcare providers and national governments can take to save lives, reduce the burden of disease and the huge associated medical costs.

Founder and CEO of the Atrial Fibrillation Association, Trudie Lobban MBE, set to speak at the event and launch The Charter, said:

“An overwhelming 45% of all embolic strokes are caused by AF and this should not be the case, as most AF-related strokes are preventable with the use of anticoagulants. This is costly; for those who lose their lives as a result, or have to cope with a debilitating disability following a stroke, and their friends and family who have to deal with the consequences of possibly caring for a loved one for the rest of their lives or worse, losing a loved one. Also, in the first year following a stroke, it costs the NHS an estimated £9,500 - £14,000 to care for a patient, with embolic strokes being the most costly.”

She continues: “With this Charter we hope to not only raise awareness, but to bring AF-related stroke to the forefront of the health agenda, and therefore I encourage patients, healthcare professionals, and policy makers to support this worthy cause and sign-up today.”

To sign the Charter, visit www.signagainststroke.com

Ends

Notes:

1. Atrial Fibrillation Association (AFA) is an international charity which provides information, support and access to established, new or innovative treatments for Atrial Fibrillation (AF);
2. AF is the most common ‘arrhythmia’ – a heart rhythm disturbance. It is estimated that more than 1.5 million people in the UK are living with AF;
3. AF sufferers are up to five times more likely to suffer with a stroke and a estimated 12,500 strokes per year are attributed to AF;
4. For more information contact Bridgette Honegan, Communications and Public Affairs Associate at Atrial Fibrillation Association, on 01789 450787 or email Bridgette@afa.org.uk