



April 2014: AF Association welcomes Rugby football Union referee Wayne Barnes, 34, as our newest charity patron.

Wayne, who became a professional referee in 2005, has an acute awareness of atrial fibrillation (AF): he was diagnosed with the condition in 2012.

AF is the most common heart rhythm disorder and raises the risk of stroke five-fold. In 2009 Wayne noticed his heart was beating irregularly and that he was becoming breathless when exercising, unexpected symptoms for someone seemingly so fit and healthy working in a high-intensity sport. He said:

“Common symptoms of heart rhythm disorders like atrial fibrillation include palpitations, shortness of breath and feeling faint. With me breathlessness was a big one. If you have any of these symptoms, I urge you to Know Your Pulse; if it’s not beating like a clock it’s time to go see the Doc.”

Specialists at the Rugby Football Union referred the rugby referee, who at 21 was the youngest official to be appointed to the National Panel of Referees, to a heart rhythm specialist after the first onset of symptoms. Professor Richard Schilling, AF Association Trustee and consultant cardiologist at London Barts Health NHS trust said:

“AF is the most common heart rhythm disorder and affects an estimated 650,000 people in the UK. Many people newly diagnosed with the condition who have enjoyed athletic pursuits might fear an end to their way of life but Wayne’s story shows that this is not the case; prompt treatment can lead to successful outcomes in AF.”

In December 2009, Wayne underwent a successful catheter ablation procedure to correct his irregular heart rhythm. Less than four weeks later, he was back on the Rugby pitch refereeing the 2010 RBS Six Nations. He said:

“I was fortunate to receive a rapid diagnosis from the first set of symptoms. Sadly 50% of those living with AF are

asymptomatic and unaware that they have a condition that carries a 500% increased risk of stroke. I urge anyone newly diagnosed to push for a referral to a specialist in the area who can review medication and help restore health and quality of life as quickly as possible.”

“In my new role as patron I hope to share my story and make sure that all those living with this at times scary condition know how to seek support and receive appropriate treatment.”

AF Association Founder and CEO, Trudie Lobban MBE said:

“AF can affect anyone, not just the elderly. Through prompt and successful treatment, Wayne has been able to return to a career that he loves. As our newest Patron his inspirational account will hopefully reassure the many young people diagnosed with AF who we speak to on our helpline.”