

AFA calls for urgent action to prevent impending stroke crisis in Latin America

12 September 2011, Bristol: The Atrial Fibrillation Association (AFA) is backing a call on national policymakers in Latin America to take urgent action against preventable strokes that strike millions of people with atrial fibrillation (AF) each year. *How Can We Avoid a Stroke Crisis in Latin America?*, a report from *Action for Stroke Prevention* – a group of health experts from around the world - reveals the huge economic, social and personal burden of AF-related strokes across the region. The report proposes measures to tackle stroke in patients with AF, the most common, sustained abnormal heart rhythm and a major cause of stroke. Millions of people in Latin America suffer from AF: in Brazil, there are around 1.5 million patients living with AF and in Venezuela, it is thought there are 230,000 AF sufferers.

“This is an epidemic that is already happening. Stroke is a serious public health threat in Latin America,” said Dr. Carlos Cantú, Professor of Stroke Program at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Founding Member of the Mexican Stroke Association.

Action for Stroke Prevention’s recommendations, which are endorsed by AFA include:

- Improving awareness of the impact of AF and AF-related stroke
- Developing methods for early and adequate diagnosis of AF and stroke risk assessment
- Taking new and better approaches to prevent stroke in patients with AF
- Facilitating the exchange of best practice between national governments in Latin America
- Developing strategies to support adherence to guidelines
- Providing equal and adequate administration of therapy for patients with AF across countries in Latin America

- Advancing research into the causes, prevention and management of AF, and addressing the current paucity of epidemiological information in Latin America

“The majority of AF-related strokes are preventable through earlier detection and better disease management. Our report’s recommendations offer strategic measures that can be taken to prevent a potentially devastating epidemic,” said Dr. Jorge Gonzalez-Zuelgaray, Chief of Service of Arrhythmias and Electrophysiology, Sanatorio de la Trinidad San Isidro, Buenos Aires; president, Arrhythmia Alliance and AFA, Argentina. *“Increasing understanding of AF and AF-related stroke among governments, healthcare providers and the public, encouraging the development and use of new approaches to the management of AF, and improving adherence to clinical guidelines are the first steps.”*

In addition to a high risk of stroke, patients with AF suffer from more severe strokes and have a poorer prognosis after the event than patients without AF. For many patients, surviving a stroke can be worse than dying from one. Basic functions many of us take for granted, such as walking and speaking, can be severely affected and the sudden onset of stroke means that the affected individual and their family members are not prepared to deal with the physical, psychological and financial burden it can impose. *“Policymakers and payers need to better understand AF and AF-related stroke to inform their decision making,”* said Trudie Lobban, Founder and Trustee, Arrhythmia Alliance, and co-founder and CEO, Atrial Fibrillation Association. *“The risk of an AF-related stroke increases with age. We each have a one in four lifetime chance of developing AF so it is clear that there is an unmet medical need for stroke prevention in people with atrial fibrillation.”*

Ends

Notes:

1. For full report see www.afa-international.org
2. For more information, contact Jo Jerrome at jo@afa.org.uk