

## UK facing a 'stroke epidemic'

5<sup>th</sup> December 2011

BRITAIN is facing a stroke epidemic, two charities have warned. The Atrial Fibrillation Association and AntiCoagulation Europe UK say atrial fibrillation, or irregular heartbeat, which increases risk of strokes, could become a big killer. More than a million people suffer from it but many do not know it and costs the NHS £2.2 billion a year. Trudie Lobban, of the AFA, said: "If patients receive anti-coagulation drugs their risk of stroke is greatly reduced."

**PRESS  
ASSOCIATION**

## Irregular heartbeat stroke warning

5<sup>th</sup> December 2011

Major improvements are needed in the treatment of a common irregular heartbeat to avoid a stroke epidemic, according to a report.

Some 12,000 strokes in the UK each year are a direct result of atrial fibrillation (AF), the most common sustained heart rhythm disorder, says the study by the Atrial Fibrillation Association (AFA) and AntiCoagulation Europe UK (Ace UK).

The condition increases the risk of stroke by nearly 500%, it adds.

Many of these strokes could be prevented with more use of anticoagulation therapy, the report says.

Despite widespread availability of these treatments, only 18% of AF patients who could benefit from anticoagulation receive adequate therapy, it adds.

AF is responsible for 45% of embolic strokes (the most common kind, caused by blood clots). It is also responsible for strokes which are more severe and lead to greater disability, increase the risk of a further stroke and are more expensive for the NHS.

The report calls for the introduction of a targeted programme of routine manual pulse checks by GPs, and a major public and patient educational programme to improve detection and diagnosis.

It also urges equal access to AF treatments and services, regardless of location, and Government-supported research into the causes, prevention and treatment of the condition.

AFA chief executive and founder Trudie Lobban said: "Given the high burden and the high rate of under-treatment, we also today launch [www.afstrokerisk.org](http://www.afstrokerisk.org) which enables anyone with AF to answer

a simple set of questions which generate a comprehensive report on their personal stroke risk. We urge anyone with AF to use this new tool."

The report has been published at [www.preventaf-strokecrisis.org](http://www.preventaf-strokecrisis.org).



## Doctors to check pulse of every patient to prevent 12,000 strokes a year

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Doctors are being urged to check the pulse of every patient they see. Research suggests that doing so could prevent 12,000 strokes a year. Charities have called for pulse checks to become a routine part of every GP visit, to help diagnose sufferers of atrial fibrillation. AF is the most common heart rhythm disturbance, affecting around 800,000 Britons, and causes around one in seven first-time strokes. Lifesaver? Doctors are being told to check the pulse of every patient they see as research suggests that doing so could prevent 12,000 strokes a year. Lifesaver? Doctors are being told to check the pulse of every patient they see as research suggests that doing so could prevent 12,000 strokes a year. The upper chambers of the heart beat faster than normal, allowing blood to pool and generate tiny clots – which can trigger a stroke. The most common symptom is a fast and irregular heartbeat, usually over 140 beats a minute. A report from the Atrial Fibrillation Association and AntiCoagulation Europe warns of an epidemic of the ‘vastly undertreated’ condition, and calls for routine manual pulse checks that could lead to more patients being diagnosed and treated and prevent thousands of strokes. Priority: Eve Knight, of AntiCoagulation Europe, said that checking for pulses could revolutionise detection and management of AF. Priority: Eve Knight, of AntiCoagulation Europe, said that checking for pulses could revolutionise detection and management of AF. The report cites a UK study involving 15,000 patients, which found that GPs identified 50 per cent more cases of AF when they conducted random pulse checks. Presently, only one in five Britons with AF receives treatment that will cut their risk of stroke – typically with anti-clotting drug warfarin – but AFA chief executive Trudie Lobban said the simple test could save 12,000 a year from AF-related strokes. Eve Knight, chief executive of the charity AntiCoagulation Europe, said detecting AF and preventing related strokes ‘must be a key priority’. She said routine pulse checks ‘could revolutionise detection and management’ of AF. Joe Korner, Director of Communications for The Stroke Association, said ‘Atrial fibrillation is a major risk factor for stroke yet very few people have heard of the condition and even fewer realise that it can increase your risk of stroke by up to five times. ‘In many cases AF related strokes are preventable and blood thinning treatment options can control the condition and keep your stroke risk down. The Stroke Association fully supports the calls to action outlined in this report and would like to see more people asking their doctor for a pulse check if they are worried.’