

News Release

15th November 2018

Checking your pulse can give early warning of stroke risk

- Atrial Fibrillation (AF) affects around 1.7 per cent of the UK population, a third of which are thought not to show any symptoms (asymptomatic).
- Public Health England estimates there are 36,183 undiagnosed AF patients within East Midlands.
- If left untreated, AF can lead to serious complications such as heart failure and stroke.

AF is the most common arrhythmia (heart rhythm disorder) and occurs when chaotic electrical activity results in the heart rhythm being irregular, too fast or too slow.

The East Midlands has higher rates of AF than the English average (1.79% compared to 1.71% - March 2016) and so PHE East Midlands is supporting AF Association Global AF Aware Week.

The theme for the week is “Know Your Pulse to Know your Heart Rhythm” because the easiest way to detect an arrhythmia is to check your pulse by hand by following the four simple steps outlined by the AF Association (www.knowyourpulse.org).

Whilst this is effective, the East Midlands Academic Health Science Network, the East Midlands Clinical Network and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in the East Midlands are working together to roll out the use of mobile heart rhythm monitoring devices. These devices are more sensitive for detecting AF and means fewer patients have to go to hospital for ECG (electrocardiogram) tests. This means patients can be tested at their local GP, quickly and easily. A patient simply places their fingers on the device, which is linked to a smartphone or tablet, and within seconds it identifies if they are at risk of AF, allowing action to be taken to help avoid the risk of suffering a life-threatening AF-related stroke.

Ann Crawford, Deputy Director - Health, Wellbeing and Workforce Development at PHE East Midlands, said: “Despite the increased risk of an AF-related stroke, AF need not be life-threatening if appropriately managed and anticoagulation therapy prescribed. It is estimated that 5,000 AF-related strokes and 2,000 premature deaths could be avoided every year in the UK through effective detection and protection with anticoagulation therapy.”

Trudie Lobban MBE, Founder and CEO of AF Association, says awareness is crucial: “AF Association - Global AF Aware Week encourages people to identify symptoms with a simple pulse check. If you frequently feel an irregular or fast pulse, you should seek medical advice. The sooner AF is detected, the sooner a person could be protected with anticoagulation therapy to reduce their risk of an AF-related stroke, and also discuss treatment options with their healthcare professional. Remember Detect, Protect and Correct – there is life after a diagnosis of AF!”

ENDS

Notes to editors

The AF Association provides support, information and guidance to anyone affected by atrial fibrillation (AF). 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 – www.heartrhythmalliance.org

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