

Combating vascular disease in Scotland



As an organisation we are delighted that, as from this issue, *The British Journal of Cardiology* will become the official journal of the Scottish Heart and Arterial Risk Prevention group (SHARP). SHARP, a registered charity launched in Scotland in 1988, now attracts members from across the UK bringing together a wide range of healthcare professionals interested in the prevention and management of cardiovascular disease (CVD). Seventeen years later, its aim remains the same, to help reduce and prevent, premature morbidity and mortality from CVD in Scotland. Although the rates of coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke have steadily declined in Scotland, it is acknowledged that it has not been at the rate of our northern European neighbours, with the 2002 age-standardised mortality from CHD in both sexes aged 35–74 being higher in Scotland than the other home countries.^{1,2} The progress being made in England has recently been highlighted by the 2005 report of the National Service Framework (NSF) for CHD and the Myocardial Infarction National Audit Project's (MINAP's) fourth annual report published in June of this year.^{3,4} The Strategy for CHD and Stroke in Scotland was published in 2002 and, at that time, an additional £40 million of funding was made available to support its implementation.⁵ The variations in the management of heart disease across the UK have recently been highlighted, confirming that the need for SHARP and the important role it plays in Scotland remain as strong as ever.⁷ The work of SHARP falls into three main categories – implementation of evidence, education and research.

Evidence

The development and dissemination of national clinical guidelines with recommendations for effective practice based on current evidence are the responsibility of the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN), with SHARP members playing an active role in that process. In the last year, two stroke guidelines on the management of dysphagia and stroke rehabilitation have been published with updates on stroke assessment and the management of carotid stenosis due. Next year, two new guidelines are due to be published. The guideline on peripheral arterial disease is currently out to peer review and the five component draft guidelines for CHD (prevention, stable angina, acute coronary syndromes, heart failure and arrhythmias) have been available for consultation

and comment on the SIGN website.⁶ The SHARP Cardiovascular Risk Pack is a regularly updated evidence implementation tool which provides clinicians with the key information they require in an easy to follow format for all the main cardiovascular topics. This approach will continue with the publication of the new SIGN and also other national guidelines.

Education

SHARP organises a full range of scientific and educational meetings which are renowned for their high quality, attracting expert speakers from both home and abroad. These meetings bring together both primary and secondary care professionals from all relevant disciplines, providing a forum for full discussion as well as allowing an exchange of opinion and ideas. This year's SHARP winter scientific meeting was held at Dunkeld on the 24th and 25th November 2005. The satellite symposium addressed the current approach to lipid lowering in CVD, with the main meeting looking at the modern management of all aspects of both venous and arterial peripheral vascular disease. Meeting highlights will be published in this journal. The topics of the May and November 2006 meetings will be acute coronary syndrome and diabetes updates, respectively.

The importance of encouraging people to lead a more



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healthy lifestyle and address their risk factors cannot be underestimated. A video-based programme on healthy eating featuring one of our patrons, Lorraine Kelly, has been developed into a full educational module with support materials. This is used in secondary schools as an integral part of the syllabus and as course work in Hospitality and Home Economics subjects for the Scottish Qualification Awards certificate. The Playwell project, once funding is secured, will extend this concept to a younger age group. A fully interactive web- or CD-based programme to encourage better decision-making about diet, food choice and exercise in younger children will be produced. Permission has been obtained from the publisher DC Thomson to use the Numbskulls comic strip characters from the *Beano* and the *Dandy* in this innovative 'learning through stealth' fun programme for children.

Research

SHARP continues to both fund and be directly involved in a variety of research projects. Between 1991 and 1996 the highly visible SHARP mobile screening unit, a bright red double decker bus, successfully screened for cardiovascular risk factors 9,850 men and 9,550 women aged between 18 and 70 years, mainly at their place of work.^{7,8} This has produced a unique and extensive database which has given us a better understanding of risk factor prevalence in the working population of Scotland and also allows comparison with other data. One current project is comparing the results of cardiovascular risk screening from the SHARP database with birth details of the same patients. This will inform the debate as to whether CHD risk is present at birth and whether birth weight can predict future cholesterol and blood pressure levels.

A new membership recruitment drive will soon be commencing in order to attract and reach out to all those other professionals interested in CVD but not yet involved with the

work of SHARP. There remains much to do in the prevention of CVD in Scotland but SHARP will rise to the challenge and continue to have a central and relevant role in that process.

Further information of SHARP's activities and how you can become involved is available on our website www.heartscotland.org

Conflict of interest

AB is a member of the SIGN Coronary Heart Disease Guideline Development Steering Group.

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