

Know your pulse: Arrhythmia Awareness Week, 8th – 14th June 2009

Trudie Lobban, Chief Executive of the Arrhythmia Alliance, writes about plans afoot to make the pulse centre stage in the forthcoming Arrhythmia Awareness Week

A global alliance of patients, carers, patient groups, community groups, health care professionals, government and allied professionals will come together from the 8th – 14th June 2009, to educate members of the public on 'Knowing your pulse'.

In the UK, there are currently more than two million people (diagnosed and undiagnosed) with an arrhythmia, including 1.2 million people with atrial fibrillation (AF). Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is the UK's biggest killer, killing more people than lung cancer, breast cancer and AIDS combined.

Arrhythmia Alliance (A-A) and its sister charity, Atrial Fibrillation Association (AFA), are aiming to raise public and medical awareness of the pulse as a tool to identify potential heart arrhythmias. We hope this will encourage the pulse to be routinely checked in the same way as blood pressure and weight are routinely checked. During Awareness Week, the charities will work in collaboration with medical and health care professionals to facilitate 'pulse check' clinics, where members of the local public can attend for free pulse checks.

Those attending will be given a 'pulse check card' (www.knowyourpulse.org), a self-contained educational tool teaching people what their pulse means, and why and when they should take their

pulse. It includes a table for people to keep a record of their pulse over a seven-day period of time so that, subsequently, if there are any irregularities they will be recommended to seek advice from their General Practitioner (GP). GPs and nurses are being encouraged to routinely perform pulse checks and question all patients with risk factors for heart rhythm problems including symptoms such as dizziness, blackouts and palpitations.

The Arrhythmia Alliance encourages members of the community to get involved in Arrhythmia Awareness Week by distributing information booklets to their local general practice surgeries, clinics and hospitals. Arrhythmia Alliance patient information booklets, endorsed by the Department of Health and the A-A Executive Committee, are also available for distribution. This medical and public support will greatly increase awareness of cardiac arrhythmias – their detection, management and, ultimately, prevention.

The following facts highlight the importance and necessity for the pulse as an indicator of a potential cardiac arrhythmia, most commonly, AF:

- Over two million people have an arrhythmia in the UK
- SCA is the number one killer in the UK and Western World
- 100,000 people die each year in the UK from a SCA; the equivalent of a jumbo jet crashing every day – killing more people than lung cancer, breast cancer and AIDS combined
- 120,000 experience loss of consciousness due to an arrhythmia each year
- 30% of adults and 39% of children are misdiagnosed with epilepsy – many actually have an underlying potentially fatal cardiac arrhythmia
- In the UK, 500,000–700,000 people suffer from AF. In total, it is thought there are 1.2 million AF cases in the UK – the incidence of which is rising by 5% annually
- According to Department of Health figures, 12,500 strokes of the 110,000 recorded each year, are directly attributable to AF. Add AF and high blood pressure and the number equates to 50,000 of the 110,000 strokes
- Over a 40-year time period, AF almost doubles the risk of death
- AF leads to 575,000 hospital admissions per year. Of these about 16% are the primary cause – which is about 95,000 per year in the UK. As most are unplanned this steeply increases the costs
- AF consumes 1% of the total NHS budget per year in the UK
- 1:4 stroke patients are admitted in AF in the UK.

For further information and materials on Arrhythmia Awareness Week and to order pulse check cards: www.knowyourpulse.org, contact joannag@stars.org.uk or call 01789 451823. **Further information about the week and the various charities involved can be found at:** www.aaaw.org.uk www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk www.atrialfibrillation.org.uk www.stars.org.uk



Did You Know?

- ♥ Your pulse is a sign of your heartbeat
- ♥ A fast heart rhythm could indicate a risk of Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA)
- ♥ Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) can strike at any age and without warning
- ♥ SCA kills 250 people each day
- ♥ When someone is in Sudden Cardiac Arrest they have no pulse
- ♥ Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) together with cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is the only way to re-establish the heart's normal rhythm

