26 October 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Poor awareness of AF continues to put over 65s at risk of stroke

Around two thirds of people (67%) aged 65 or over are unable to recognise atrial fibrillation, a form of irregular heartbeat, as a warning sign of stroke, according to a survey published by The Stroke Association to mark World Stroke Day (29 October).

Approximately 750,000 people in the UK are affected by atrial fibrillation (AF), one of the most common heart rhythm disturbances, which can be easily diagnosed through a pulse check. The risk of developing the condition increases significantly in older people, yet in the survey carried out by Ipsos MORI, only one-third (33%) of people over 65 recognised that AF could lead to a stroke. The most common symptom of AF is a fast and irregular heartbeat, usually over 140 beats a minute. However, other symptoms include heart palpitations, shortness of breath, chest discomfort, light headedness, fainting or fatigue.

Steve Benveniste, Campaigns Officer at The Stroke Association says: “Atrial fibrillation increases your risk of stroke by up to five times and around 12,500 strokes a year are thought to be directly linked to the condition.

“It’s worrying that such a significant proportion of people over the age of 65 are unaware of the link between AF and stroke, especially because they are more likely than any other age group to develop the heart condition. If you have experienced any of the symptoms or are at all worried about your risk, it is vital that you speak to your GP and arrange to get your pulse checked.”

Brian (67) from Cumbria was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation in 2007. He had been feeling ill for a while and had been suffering from breathlessness, however, it wasn’t until his wife, Jean, one day noticed that his lips had gone blue that they realised something was seriously wrong and Brian was taken to A&E.

At hospital Brian was told that he was suffering from atrial fibrillation and he was put on warfarin. Brian explains; “Although I was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation I had no
I could be at risk of having a stroke. I was taken off warfarin after a year of being on it and then went on to have a stroke a few months later. It came as a complete shock.

“Much more needs to be done to raise awareness of the link between AF and stroke and I would strongly urge everyone over the age of 55 to visit their GP to have their pulse checked as a stroke can often be prevented.”

Brian has been left paralysed down his right side as a result of his stroke and has communication difficulties. Unfortunately, he has been unable to return to his part time job. However, he remains incredibly positive about life and has started volunteering at his local Age UK shop.

ITV Daybreak’s Dr Hilary Jones says; “We know that atrial fibrillation is a major risk factor for stroke. The condition causes your heart to beat irregularly and less efficiently meaning that blood clots are more likely to form which could cause a stroke if they travel to the brain. However, AF can be quickly and easily diagnosed and treatment options are available to reduce your risk of stroke. It is therefore very important for anyone concerned about their heartbeat to visit their GP for a pulse check.”

The Stroke Association’s ‘Ask First to prevent a stroke later’ campaign aims to increase awareness of the link between AF and stroke and encourages members of the public to ask their GP about their risk of developing AF. To find out more about atrial fibrillation and the Ask First campaign visit: www.stroke.org.uk/askfirst

According to the World Stroke Organisation, one in six people worldwide will have a stroke in their lifetime.

Ends

For further information, interviews and case studies please contact Meredith Molony at The Stroke Association Press Office: Tel: 020 7566 0328

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1 About the survey:
Results for the survey are based on 2,021 interviews conducted face-to-face in respondents’ homes between 6th and 12th May. 428 of the interviews were with people aged 65 or over. The interviews took place among a nationally representative sample of adults aged 15+ across Great Britain. Data have been weighted to the known population.

All questions were asked on Ipsos MORI’s national omnibus (Capibus).

About The Stroke Association’s Ask First campaign:

The Stroke Association is campaigning to ensure that primary healthcare professionals are screening, diagnosing and treating atrial fibrillation. The charity aims to raise awareness of atrial fibrillation and its link to stroke amongst the public and will lobby national policy makers for better implementation of guidance around AF detection/treatment. The campaign is partly funded by an unrestricted educational grant by Bayer Healthcare, Boehringer Ingelheim and sanofi-aventis. The Stroke Association retains full control on its campaign messages and materials.

About stroke and The Stroke Association:

150,000 people have a stroke in the UK and it’s the UK’s third biggest killer.

A stroke is a brain attack which happens when the blood supply to the brain is cut off, caused by a clot or bleeding in the brain. A stroke can be diagnosed by using FAST – Facial weakness, Arm weakness, Speech problems, Time to call 999. If any of these symptoms are present call an ambulance straight away.

The Stroke Association campaigns, educates and informs to increase knowledge of stroke at all levels of society acting as a voice for everyone affected by stroke. The charity funds research into prevention, treatment, better methods of rehabilitation and helps stroke patients and their families directly through its community support services as well as providing information through its helpline, leaflets and factsheets.

The Stroke Helpline provides information on stroke to the general public and is open between 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday on 0303 303 3100.

More information on The Stroke Association can be found at www.stroke.org.uk