Poor awareness of AF puts Londoners at risk of stroke

Four in five Londoners (83%) 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 and it is a major risk factor for stroke.

According to the survey which was carried out by Ipsos MORI, only 34% of people in Great Britain accurately identified that AF could lead to a future stroke; however, people from Greater London were the least aware with only 17% of Londoners making the link between the two conditions. 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 in London are unaware of the link between AF and stroke. 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.”

Joy, 80, from Westerham, had a severe stroke seven years ago. Although a fit, healthy and active lady Joy suffered from atrial fibrillation. Joy says; “I’d been suffering from AF for four years before my stroke and although I had been told that there was a possibility that I could have a stroke, I didn’t realise how big the risk was
and when it actually happened it was a complete shock. My whole world was turned upside down."

Joy’s stroke left her paralysed down her right side and she was unable to communicate for many months. However, Joy has worked incredibly hard over the last few years and through determination she has made significant progress.

Joy says; “The last few years have been incredibly tough for both me and my family. I’d never heard of AF before being diagnosed with it and I had no idea that the condition could increase someone’s risk of stroke. The symptoms of AF are not prominent in everyone meaning that it can go undetected for years, so getting your pulse checked when you visit the doctor is very important.”

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 sooner rather than later.”

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 AF.

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. The interviews took place among a nationally representative sample of adults aged 15+ across Great Britain. 282 interviews took place in Greater London. 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