

Case Study

A Campaign to Raise Awareness of Atrial Fibrillation (AF) in Lancashire.

June 2015.

North West Coast Academic Health Science Network

AF/Stroke Prevention Programme

Academic Health Science Networks (AHSN) were set up:

- To identify and address unmet need/ priority improvement areas
- To speed up the adoption of innovation
- To identify and enable research
- To create wealth

We work with the NHS, business, third sector, Universities and others to achieve our goals. Atrial Fibrillation is one of our key work programmes and we have a series of projects to support the effective **awareness raising, identification**, management and treatment of AF. This case study is one of a series we are developing about our work.

[Why is it important to raise awareness of Atrial Fibrillation \(AF\)?](#)

Atrial fibrillation is the most common sustained cardiac arrhythmia and is associated with a prothrombotic state. AF confers a 5-fold increase in the risk of stroke, and one in five of all strokes is attributed to this arrhythmia. Not only is AF a major risk factor for stroke, but when strokes occur in association with AF, the patients suffer increased levels of mortality, morbidity and disability and longer hospital stays compared with stroke patients without AF. Stroke prevention and management is high on the Department of Health agenda as the consequences of stroke are associated with a significant health and social care burden. AF is easily detectable through a pulse test, but individuals may not necessarily experience other symptoms.

Currently in Lancashire about 15% of strokes caused by AF are experienced by those who did not know they had AF – this is about 110 people each year.

Facts and Figures

About **800,000 people in the UK** are affected by AF. Today this figure is suspected to be closer to 1 million and growing. It affects more men (8 per 1,000) than women (5 per 1,000) and becomes more common as you get older affecting - about 1 in 200 between 60 and 65 rising to 10% of people over 75 years. AF occurs more in people with high blood pressure or atherosclerosis. Episodes of AF can also be triggered by binge drinking alcohol, being overweight, caffeine, illegal drugs and smoking. AF consumes 1% of the total NHS annual budget.

At the age of 40, we all have a 1 in 4 life time risk of developing AF.

AF in Lancashire

There are 1,520,393 people registered with a GP in Lancashire, with 24,735 people diagnosed with AF. This is a prevalence of 1.62%, which is slightly above the national average (the actual average is thought to be an underestimate with the true rate nearer to 2%). Lancashire County Council modelled the likely prevalence of AF in Lancashire based of QOF figures and concluded that the true number of AF cases in the region should be 32,169. This translates to 7,434 cases of undiagnosed AF. We know that AF confers a 5-fold increase in the risk of stroke, and one in five of all strokes is attributed to this arrhythmia.

The Numbers are Rising...

200,000 people are newly diagnosed AF patients per year in the UK, and this is rising due to an aging population and increased numbers surviving conditions which predispose them to AF. There is also a reduction in mortality among patients with other co-morbidities such as heart failure and hypertension and detection of previously unknown arrhythmias, enabling patients to receive timely and effective diagnosis and treatment.

What does a Stroke Cost?

Stroke costs the public purse over £20K in the first year and £6K every year the person survives post stroke, it is clearly an area which deserves attention. This does not include Social Care costs which are estimated at £7,500 per year or costs to the individuals' families and informal carers.

Our campaign to raise awareness of AF in Lancashire – what did we do?

The Atrial Fibrillation (AF) Campaign was developed in response to a clinical and community need to help

The key aims of our campaign were to:

- Targeted the over 60s

- Raise awareness of the importance of pulse in health at a range of events including workshops, drop-ins and conferences
- Facilitate self-testing
- Take over 500 pulses
- Give advice and information
- Advise people with an irregular pulse to visit their GP for advice
- Deliver an event for clinical staff

What support did we need?

We could not have delivered the campaign without support from a variety of partners. Some was commissioned and others provided free of charge. Our campaign was successful due to good PR and Media interest underpinned by support from the Preston North End; Lancashire Teaching Hospital Trust; the Stroke Association, British Heart Foundation, Healthwatch, Lancashire County Council, Heartbeat, Atrial Fibrillation Association

- Lancashire Teaching Hospital (nursing and consultant support)
 - The Stroke Association (support at events – took blood pressure)
 - Atrial Fibrillation Association (materials)
 - Healthwatch (support at events)
 - Radio Lancashire (publicity and coverage at workshop)
 - Preston North End (venue, legend George Ross)
 - Bill Beaumont (ex rugby and media presenter)
 - Influential (PR Company)
 - Strategic clinical network (Support in arranging workshops and event for clinical staff)
- Events
 - 3 drop-in pulse testing events supported by clinical staff
 - 2 workshops and supported by nurses and clinical staff
 - 2 meetings (Lancashire County Council and Preston Rotary)
 - Incentives were provided through the football club donating a raffle prize for the drop-ins and a raffle at the workshops.
 - 4 conferences (led by others e.g. Mela, Stroke Association etc.)
 - An event for clinicians, the NHS and others in promoting best practice in AF

Participants were encouraged to take materials prepared by the Atrial Fibrillation Association on how to take your pulse. The “Know your Pulse” campaign that the AFA ran was broadly followed.

What happened?

Over 500 pulses were tested – 468 completed form for the evaluation. There was good penetration in the Lancashire area and the desired age group (over 60s).

172 people attended the workshops; 113 (66%) female and 29 (34%) were male.

296 attended the drop-in events; 154 (52%) were female and 142 (48%) were male.

Attendance by Ethnicity

ETHNICITY	NUMBER	% Of FOOTFALL	AF CASES	% AF by ETHNICITY
ASIAN	6	1.38%	1	17%
BLACK AFRICAN	26	5.99%	0	0%
BLACK BRITISH	1	0.23%	0	0%
CARIBBEAN	1	0.23%	0	0%
CHINESE	1	0.23%	0	0%
INDIAN	18	4.15%	2	11%
IRISH	2	0.46%	0	0%
ITALIAN	1	0.23%	0	0%
PAKISTANI	3	0.69%	0	0%
WB	407	93.78%	31	8%
UNKNOWN	2	0.46%	0	0%

A total of 34 abnormal pulses were detected. All of these were given a letter for themselves detailing our campaign and a letter which we sent to their GP with their permission.

The AF events were well attended, and the footfall at drop-in events was in some cases greater than the team could cope with. Future events should be delivered at similar convenient locations and select well attended and established events such as the Health Mela. The spread of attendees reflected the demographics of the region.

Pulse testing was effective at being linked to other activities such as the Health Mela and the Stroke Month events. Word of mouth is an important means of encouraging people to attend as well as media such as the Radio – BBC Lancashire’s Sally Naden broadcast live from one of our workshops which highlighted our future drop-ins and events.

Sports personalities Bill Beaumont (ex-rugby Union player and sports personality) and George Ross (Preston North End legend) attracts additional interest.

A number of attendees reported that they attended due to wanting a pulse check, a blood pressure check, or because they had concerns about stroke or breathlessness, this demonstrates that individuals are interested in their health and want to find out more. Considerable interest was given to the handheld MyDiagnostick devices which were used in the campaign.

Sustainability Options

The issue of awareness raising, helps people become aware of their own health and better understand issues such as Atrial Fibrillation and Stroke. In order to look at a sustainable approach across the region and beyond we are looking to partner organisations for support to roll it out.

The campaign may be delivered in the future through charitable organisations such as the Rotary Club, the Stroke Association, Age UK and the Atrial Fibrillation Association. The AFA, the EBC and the Stroke Association have all expressed support to take the campaign forward locally and nationally. Our toolkit means that any organisation can develop the workshops to roll-out locally.

Next Steps and other related projects

Following this campaign there has been much interest from GPs, Pharmacists and others.

We now have set up a “support for detection of AF” project for GPs and others.

Currently we are supporting:

- MyDiagnostick as a tool for opportunistic screening
- AliveCor as a device for GPs to use at their practice
- Using the Care AF pack to support patients diagnosed with AF
- Development of a Pathway to help support GPs and others with NICE guidelines
- Opportunistic screening in nursing homes
- Opportunistic screening with Pharmacists
- Development of Self-Care work
- The development of a commissioning tool-kit for CCGs

Contact

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