

Gaps in AF understanding highlight need for support

BY LOUISE WALLACE

ONE in four patients with atrial fibrillation has a poor understanding of their condition and would be unable to explain the syndrome to another person, a study finds.

Patients saw health professionals, particularly GPs, as their most important source of information about AF, according to the survey of more than 1500 patients and cardiologists in 11 countries, including Australia.

When questioned, cardiologists deemed the level and quality of information provided to patients about AF to be poor compared with information on other cardiovascular diseases.

Yet one in four cardiologists felt that AF was either too complicated to explain to patients or that they did not have enough time to fully explain the condition during consultations, researchers said.

"The apparent gaps between

More than one-third of patients reported that they were worried or afraid about their AF.



patient and physician understanding of AF reported in the survey could be interpreted as highlighting a need to support patients through better information provision and education," the authors wrote.

"More than one-third of patients reported that they were worried or afraid about their AF and stated

that they need more reassurance and counselling on their condition."

In other survey findings, cardiologists were more concerned than patients about the risk of stroke and hospitalisation from AF, whereas patients were more worried about the mortality risk.

Most AF patients were sympto-

matic, but 75% of people said they were satisfied with their therapy, the study authors said.

On average, AF patients made nine visits a year to doctors, they wrote in *Europace*, a journal from the European Society of Cardiology.

Commenting on the findings, Sydney-based cardiologist Professor Ben Freedman said the study highlighted education gaps that must be addressed. He said urgent changes were also needed to improve general awareness about AF, to ensure patients sought help when they started to experience symptoms.

"More support would help patients identify warning signs and symptoms — such as irregular pulse and heart rate — and approach doctors in time so they get the best treatment," he said.

The survey was supported with a grant from Sanofi-Aventis. *Europace* 2010; online.

Medical Observer, 14th May 2010

Cardiologists rate AF as third most demanding condition

Laura Macfarlane

Cardiologists consider atrial fibrillation to be the third most demanding heart condition and the second most difficult condition to manage, international research shows.

The survey of over 1600 cardiologists and AF patients in 11 countries including Australia found that more than one in four physicians felt that AF was either too complicated or they did not have enough time to explain the condition to patients.

It also found that only 43% of physicians and 55% of patients

considered AF to be life-threatening despite evidence that AF carries a fivefold increase in the risk of stroke and twice the risk of death.

More than half of the patients surveyed had their AF diagnosed during a routine check-up or during a visit for another condition despite experiencing sustained, ongoing symptoms. At least one in four patients said they did not understand and could not explain the condition.

Nearly all patients surveyed reported being treated for AF, yet despite clinical evidence that unmanaged AF can become

intractable, more than 80% reported ongoing symptoms.

The authors noted that patients voiced high levels of satisfaction with treatment. Conversely, physician satisfaction with AF treatments was low relative to other CV medications.

"A comprehensive international patient and professional information and support programme on AF is urgently needed... the survey authors concluded.

Dr Gerry Kaye, an electrophysiologist from the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane, told *Cardiology Update* that although there are

newer pharmacotherapies available, cardiologists can be frustrated by the limitations of these treatments.

Dr Kaye agreed that AF was difficult to manage in terms of patient knowledge and treatment compliance but says in Australia some general cardiologists do not appreciate that the field has changed.

"There is some ignorance about other treatment options. Ablation is completely underutilised here," he said.

Europace 2010;12:626-633.

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Cardiology Update, 14th May 2010

Serious risks of AF are widely misunderstood

Kirrilly Burton

MAJOR gaps exist in the knowledge of the cardiovascular risks associated with atrial fibrillation (AF), according to a recent international study which found that both patients and cardiologists may underestimate the seriousness of the condition.

A survey of more than 1600 cardiologists and patients with AF in 11 countries, including Australia, revealed only 43% of cardiologists and 55% of patients considered AF to be life-threatening, despite the condition doubling the risk of death, and having a five times greater risk of stroke.

Cardiologists also underestimated their patient's understanding of the benefits of AF treatments and overestimated their knowledge about treatment complications.


"The survey results paint a disturbing picture where the level of understanding about AF – even among cardiologists – is insufficient for patients to fully appreciate the seriousness and risks," the authors said.

Analysis of Australian survey results showed only 35% of cardiologists rated treatment efficacy and safety for AF as 'good.'

Australian cardiologists considered the condition to be among the most demanding and difficult to manage and were unhappy with the availability and quality of educational material on it.

Associate Professor Lynne Pressley, a cardiologist at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney, said one of the main issues was lack of effective treatments. "The facts are it's [AF ablation] only successful about 80% of the time, about 60% of people need two procedures and each procedure takes about five hours," she said.

Professor Ben Freedman, a cardiologist at Concord Repatriation Hospital, NSW, said evidence showed low use of anticoagulants in high-risk patients, even by cardiologists.

"There is probably more fear which leads to non-prescription but it's also a difficult area and... warfarin is not a kind drug to use," he said. 

Eurpace 2010: 12:625-33

Australian Doctor 14th May, 2010