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Program for atrial fibrillation patients launched

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Singapore: A patient education program targeting stroke reduction for patients with atrial fibrillation is being launched in Singapore. This National Neuroscience Institute (NNI) project is supported by Boehringer-Ingelheim.

Atrial fibrillation is a heart rhythm disorder in which the heart beats irregularly. This condition increases the risk of stroke by five-fold. Stroke occurs when the blood supply of the brain is compromised, and results in brain damage causing the symptoms and signs of strokes. Stroke often results in physical and cognitive impairments and two-thirds of patients have some form of disability following stroke. AF-related strokes tend to be more severe and disabling.

The AF for AF initiative is part of the '1 Mission 1 Million' global public education campaign of Boehringer-Ingelheim. It was developed by NNI following a grant awarded to Associate Professor Deidre Anne De Silva, consultant at the Department of Neurology, NNI (Singapore General Hospital Campus) and her team.

The NNI team designed and produced the "AF pack" which aims to educate patients with AF on the risk of stroke and what they can do to reduce their risk.

Another important focus is education on how to recognise the symptoms of stroke and the importance of presenting early to hospital in order to receive treatment that can minimise disability and dependence.

She said, "Empowering patients with atrial fibrillation with knowledge of their condition and its management is so important. Better understanding of their AF condition will encourage compliance to treatments to reduce their stroke risk. There is an opportunity for stroke prevention through blood-thinning medications as well as control of risk factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol."

A spokesperson for Boehringer Ingelheim said that AF occurs in about 1 percent of Singapore population and its prevalence increases with age. This initiative is timely as Singapore has the third fastest ageing population in the world and thus the burden of AF is expected to rise.

A/Prof De Silva said as AF is a major stroke risk factor, it is important for AF patients to know how to recognise symptoms of stroke.

"Early treatment in the first few hours can limit the devastating effects of stroke. A key feature of the AF pack is the use of the FAST message to easily remember the symptoms of stroke and to educate patients on the importance of seeking treatment as soon as possible when stroke occurs."