

Study: Treatment Gap in Patients Suffering From Atrial Fibrillation



Findings of a study by University of Birmingham reveal a treatment gap in patients suffering from atrial fibrillation (AF). Research findings are published in Heart.

AF is associated with a five-fold increase in risk of stroke. There are three types of AF:

- paroxysmal where episodes come and go and usually stop without any treatment
- persistent where episodes can last for periods of more than seven days and are either treated with medicines or through cardioversion
- permanent where irregular heartbeat is present all the time and cardioversion has been unsuccessful in restoring normal rhythm.

Patients with any type of AF are at a higher risk of stroke. Guidelines recommend the use of anticoagulant treatment such as warfarin in such patients to reduce risk of stroke.

A study conducted by the University of Birmingham's Institute of Applied Health Research reveals that patients with paroxysmal AF are significantly less likely to receive anticoagulants for stroke prevention as compared to patients with persistent or permanent AF.

During the study, the researchers analysed records of 14 million patients and covered a 15 year period between 2000 and 2015. They found that patients with paroxysmal AF were less likely to be prescribed anticoagulants. While the proportion has increased over the years, in 2015 there was a treatment gap of 13% as compared to 15% in 2000. This is an area of concern since the diagnosis of paroxysmal AF has become three times more common over the same time period.

"Underuse of anticoagulants in patients with paroxysmal AF is likely to result in preventable strokes among this group, leading to greater levels of avoidable death and disability. Although the gap is narrowing, we need to remind ourselves that all patients with AF are at increased risk of stroke. Paroxysmal AF patients should be given the same priority for stroke prevention as other AF patients," says corresponding author Dr Nicola Adderley.

Source: [University of Birmingham](#)

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