

For immediate release

SLCSN calls for GP pulse checks and heart rhythm awareness

6 June 2011: The South London and Cardiac and Stroke Network (SLCSN) are partnering with the Arrhythmia Alliance to highlight the need for simple GP pulse checks to detect severe heart rhythm disorders.

This week, 6-12 June, is Heart Rhythm Week, an annual event organised by Arrhythmia Alliance, aiming to encourage pulse checks through the Know Your Pulse campaign. The Network is supporting the Arrhythmia Alliance by raising awareness to the campaign. GPs are encouraged to take action by “Putting Pulse into Practice” and making a free and potentially life-saving check a standardised part of the NHS Health Check for everyone over the age of 40.

Trudie Lobban MBE, founder and trustee of Arrhythmia Alliance, said, “Finding out about arrhythmias early could improve a patient's chance of finding a successful treatment and could save their life. That is why Arrhythmia Alliance wants to put pulse into practice and ensure people have their pulse checked when they visit their GP surgery.”

Cardiac arrhythmia is abnormal electrical activity in the heart which affects the way the heart beats. It is the number one killer in the UK. More than two million people in the UK have an arrhythmia and it affects people of any age. Untreated, arrhythmia can lead to sudden cardiac arrest, stroke and loss of consciousness. Once diagnosed, cardiac arrhythmias can usually be treated effectively with drugs, devices, surgery or a combination of these approaches.

Lucy Grothier, director of the South London and Cardiac and Stroke Network, said, “We are excited to be helping to promote understanding of arrhythmia and the Know Your Pulse campaign during Heart Rhythm Week. A pulse check is a simple test that can dramatically change a patient’s life. One of the aims of the London Cardiovascular (LCV) Project is to improve correct identification of patients with heart rhythm conditions and this campaign will help us reach this goal. Arrhythmia is highlighted in the project as a pathway needing improvement across the capital.”

In addition to supporting Heart Rhythm Week the South London and Cardiac and Stroke Network are currently working with local PCT clusters, hospital trusts and the London Cardiac and Stroke Networks to plan and implement the LCV Project. The project will improve services and care for arrhythmia patients by creating networks of hospitals where complex procedures will be carried out at central units. Central units will provide clinical support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Clinical expertise will be available in all hospitals. The LCV Project was informed by patient and clinical panels and undertook a three month period of engagement in 2010.

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Fast facts:

- More than two million people are affected by a heart rhythm disorder (or cardiac arrhythmia) in the UK

- 100,000 people die each year from sudden cardiac arrest, killing more people than breast cancer, lung cancer and AIDS combined
- 600,000+ patients diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (AF – the most common arrhythmia) in England
- Up to 120,000 individuals are misdiagnosed with epilepsy when the majority are in fact suffering with a cardiac arrhythmia.
- At the age of 40, we all have a 1 in 4 life time risk of developing AF
- There are 200,000 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

Notes to editors:

1. The London Cardiovascular Project aims to improve treatment, care and outcomes for all patients with cardiovascular disease in the capital. The project has three main areas of focus: Cardiac surgery, Cardiology, and Vascular services.
2. The model of care was designed following a review which looked at how to improve complex and emergency cardiovascular services in the capital.
3. All background documents and detailed information relating to the London Cardiovascular Project, including The Patient Perspective, Cardiovascular engagement report and model of care can be found on the South London and Cardiac and Stroke Network website – www.slcsn.nhs.uk/lcv.

For more information please contact Andrea Marlow, senior communications manager on 020 8812 5953 or info@slcsn.nhs.uk.

4. Heart Rhythm Week is organised by Arrhythmia Alliance (A-A), a coalition of individuals, patients groups, charities, professional medical groups and industry allies. These groups work together under the Arrhythmia Alliance umbrella to raise awareness of cardiac arrhythmias and to promote timely and effective diagnosis and treatment of arrhythmias leading to an improved quality of life. More information is available on their website www.heartrhythmcharity.org.uk or by contacting joanna@heartrhythmcharity.org.uk.