

ESC CONGRESS 2019

Title : Rapid referral to a one-stop AF clinic following possible AF detection by community pharmacists leads to early diagnosis and appropriate anticoagulant treatment

Topic: 5.3 - Atrial Fibrillation - Diagnostic Methods

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Background

Atrial fibrillation is the most common cardiac arrhythmia globally, responsible for one third of ischaemic strokes, often resulting in death or incapacity. This condition, frequently asymptomatic is estimated to be up to 50% undiagnosed. Reducing this risk with appropriate detection and management strategies offers substantial economic and patient benefits. Community pharmacists have been shown to be an accessible healthcare professional capable of detecting atrial fibrillation. Concerns raised utilising community pharmacists is the additional workload for primary care physicians, and lack of a clear pathway to ensure patients are adequately followed with assurance of initiation of anticoagulation therapy.

Purpose

To assess the feasibility of screening by community pharmacists with onward referral to an innovative one-stop AF clinic to enable identification of new cases of AF and subsequent initiation of anticoagulation within 2 weeks.

Methods

21 pharmacies were recruited and trained on pathophysiology of AF and demonstration of pulse taking using pulse check and Kardia mobile device. Any person walking into a community pharmacy aged ≥ 65 years was offered a free pulse check. For any irregularity detected, individualised counselling was offered with a referral made to a one-stop AF clinic for confirmation and initiation of anticoagulation. Written patient consent was obtained.

Results

672 people were recruited with an average age of 69 ± 3.5 years and 58% female ($n=389$). There was a history of hypertension in 618 (92%) and diabetes in 242 (36%), the most common co-morbidities. 45 people were referred following an irregular pulse or abnormal ECG rhythm strip, of whom 11 (1.6% of total population) had a confirmed AF diagnosis within 30 day follow up. An additional 8 cases with known AF not receiving anticoagulation termed (actionable AF) were also referred. All 19 cases of new or untreated AF were prescribed anticoagulation by the one stop clinic in accordance with guideline recommendations

Conclusions

ESC guidance recommends opportunistic screening for AF by pulse taking or ECG rhythm strip in patients ≥ 65 years of age. The 1.6% incidence of new AF was in accordance with meta-analyses identifying 1.4% of those aged ≥ 65 on a single time point check for presence of AF. Our model utilises the un-tapped skills of community pharmacy to deliver pulse checks or ECG rhythm recordings in an accessible primary care location with a clear referral pathway that is effective in early review and ensuring suitable patients receive anticoagulation. The innovative pathway could provide remote triage at scale and help address the missing people with undiagnosed and actionable AF by opening new channels for identification by healthcare professionals managing long term conditions who like pharmacists have not been considered suitable healthcare professionals due to lack of an established pathway for confirming the potential diagnosis of AF.