



## **Emergency medicine conference Monday November 21**

### **Media release: Atrial fibrillation incidence increasing in Australia – and many don't know they have it**

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is the most common cardiac arrhythmia and its incidence in Australia is steadily increasing. This is partly because the population is ageing, and partly because incidence is increasing in younger people, related to the increase in obesity and reduction in levels of physical activity.

Professor Ben Freedman, Professor of Cardiology at Concord Hospital, and Deputy Dean of Sydney Medical School, will present the latest information about AF at 4.15 pm on Monday November 21 at the annual scientific meeting of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine being held at the Sydney Convention Centre.

AF currently affects about 1% of Australians, more than half of whom are over 75 years.

About 10% of people over 80 have AF, and there may be many more Australians who have AF but don't know it – one in 200 relatively fit people who have an ECG as a check prior to operation will have AF and be completely unaware.

There is a one in four lifetime chance of ever developing AF, making it the most common serious cardiac arrhythmia.

More Australians are hospitalized as a result of AF than for stroke or heart failure.

Symptoms include palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, and sometimes chest discomfort.

More importantly, people with AF have a significantly increased risk for stroke – up to seven times that of the general population.

Those at higher risk for stroke because of age, high blood pressure, heart failure, or diabetes can have that risk greatly reduced by warfarin and newer blood thinners just becoming available in Australia.

These drugs are underused in AF because of fears about haemorrhage. Because it is such a common presentation to the emergency department, emergency physicians at this conference are interested to learn the latest information.

Aspirin, while easy to use, is relatively ineffective. In a recent study aspirin was judged to be neither safe nor effective in preventing stroke in AF.

People with AF also have a significantly higher risk of heart failure – up to three times that of the general population, and a higher overall mortality – up to 90%.

AF is therefore a major health issue in Australia, with significant financial and personal costs.

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

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