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Country: **Italy**

Titel of the project: **Defeat stroke by learning atrial fibrillation: is it possible?**

Project details

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Award amount: €100,000

Aim of our project is to diagnose asymptomatic atrial fibrillation in the general population. The target population will be instructed about self-checking of cardiac pulse and informed about the risks of co-morbidity associated with atrial fibrillation. Patients with irregular pulse will be treated and followed for 5 years after inclusion.

About 20% to 40% of subjects with atrial fibrillation are asymptomatic. This population is exposed to a significant risk of thrombo-embolic events, because most of the associated/causing conditions (hypertension, diabetes, smoking, caffeine/teine) are unrecognized and untreated. Similar to other diseases (such as some forms of carcinoma), atrial fibrillation can be easily detected, even in asymptomatic cases. The most accurate sign is represented by pulse irregularity.

Our project aims at raising awareness about the possibility for each individual to “self-recognize” asymptomatic pulse irregularity. By enabling prompt treatment of the arrhythmia responsible for irregularity and recognition of associated co-morbidities, early detection of atrial fibrillation may help reducing the incidence of stroke related to systemic embolism caused by this arrhythmia. Methods. Family doctors will be contacted by arrhythmic patients (about 6,500) treated at Policlinico San Donato (Arrhythmia and Electrophysiology Center) during the last 10 years of activity. Each of these patients will ask his/her own family doctor to take part to the “check your pulse” campaign. Similar campaigns have been already attempted in different areas, but none has used prior arrhythmic patients and a general practitioners ‘chain of awareness’ to actively involve the target population. General practitioners accepting this initiative will be provided with educational material to be exposed in their office. The educational material will be presented in the form of a booklet and will contain a brief (4 to 5 pages) easy-to-read explanatory text, together with schematics and cartoons. Two main items will be addressed in the booklet: 1) how-to perform a self-assessment of the pulse; 2) what does an irregular pulse mean and the importance to call for your doctor in search of appropriate investigation and therapy. The booklet will be released to all patients visiting the doctor’s office for personal use and distribution inside their family. We assume about 70% of our previous patients to accept and comply to our invitation. If 50% of general practitioners (serving a population of about 1,000 people each) also becomes part of the project, it is estimated that about 2,275,000 individuals could be potentially informed about our project. The project will be performed at the Hospital of San Donato Milanese, Milan, Italy. Date of start is planned on July 2011. The project can potentially be expanded to all units across the country that are keen to follow the methodology proposed above. Individuals with irregular pulse will be investigated to identify the cause of arrhythmia and potential co-morbidities. Adequate therapies will be initiated according to good clinical practice as required. Patients enrolled in the treatment program will be followed for 5 years to assess the incidence of thromboembolic and hemorrhagic events. During this time frame, we expect a lower than 4% cumulative incidence of thromboembolic/hemorrhagic events in this population. This would represent a reduction by more than 50% of the incidence of expected events in a population of AF patients with a low risk of thromboembolic/hemorrhagic events.

Audience

Type

- Healthcare professionals
- General public

Location

Italy, Europe