

Calls for annual stethoscope check-ups to detect heart valve disease

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Wednesday, 16 September 2020

Heart Valve Voice calls for annual stethoscope checks for all over 65s

Survey results show UK lags behind Europe in stethoscope use, a simple step to the early detection of common heart condition

- Heart valve disease is a common and serious condition, often associated with ageing, yet many older British people aren't aware of it
- Usually the first indication of a problem with the heart valves is a characteristic heart 'murmur' which can be heard using a stethoscope
- 1 in 3 of respondents (36.6%) reported never receiving a stethoscope check from their GP, the worst rate in Europe¹

LONDON – 14 SEPTEMBER 2020 – New data, released to mark Heart Valve Disease Awareness Week, reveal that the vast majority of older British people (96%) remain unaware of the most common form of heart valve disease, a serious, but treatable condition, and are less likely than their European counterparts to receive a simple initial step to its early detection (UK 63.4%; Europe 84%).¹

More than half of patients with severe aortic stenosis - the most common form of heart valve disease - die within two years of developing symptoms, so early detection is important, through identifying symptoms and listening to the heart with a stethoscope. , Worryingly, stethoscope checks for older people at every visit to the General Practitioner (GP) in the UK has fallen in the last two years (2017: 7%; 2019: 6.4%).¹, Moreover, the UK has the highest number of older people (36.6%) reporting that they never have their heart checked by their GP.¹

“Our older population is a key, yet underestimated, contributor to the effective functioning of our communities, families and economies, so improving the awareness, diagnosis and treatment of heart valve disease will benefit us all,” commented Wil Woan, Global Heart Hub / Heart Valve Voice. “With many over 65s missing out on GP appointments this year due to delays or fears of contracting COVID, annual stethoscope checks moving forwards could really help the early detection of this common condition. If diagnosed and treated early, the vast majority of patients return to a good quality of life. Treatment options for heart valve disease will be crucial to dealing with any surge in referrals in the future.”

Senior people are crucial contributors to the modern global economy and our society. The survey reveals that they are an active group, 64.4% of whom regularly participate in voluntary, community-based, social or physical activities.¹ However, almost two thirds of British respondents claim that heart valve disease symptoms would prevent them from undertaking physical activities (63.6%), working/volunteering (28.5%) or pursuing hobbies and interests (27.7%), suggesting a significant impact on day-to-day life.¹ In addition, the survey reveals that almost a fifth (17.5%) of older British people provide care for someone close to them.¹ Increased awareness and early detection of heart valve disease is therefore not only important to patients, but also for those dependent on them, the local community and the wider economy. It is therefore important to cherish the elderly and the work they do.

Heart valve disease affects more than 1.5 million people in the UK over the age of 65 and it's predicted that this number could double as the population ages. Yet, 96% of survey respondents aren't aware of aortic stenosis, the most common form of heart valve disease. As many people living with heart valve disease do not experience severe or noticeable symptoms, or simply put their symptoms down to ageing, diagnosis of the disease can be challenging. The survey highlights that only small numbers of older British people will seek an appointment for harder to spot symptoms such as fatigue (26%), reduced physical activity (23.1%) and feeling older than your age (16.6%).¹

"The senior population is a group at risk, and it is estimated that by the age of 75 one in eight people have heart valve disease, so it is important that they are more aware of the disease and understand the severity of often hidden symptoms to help ensure early diagnosis and timely treatment. Worryingly, we have also seen fewer patients come in to get their heart checked as a result of COVID-19, despite social distancing measures being put in place so they can go ahead safely. This may mean that they are missing out on lifesaving procedures," said Mr. Chris Young, Chairman of Heart Valve Voice, and cardiac surgeon at St. Thomas' Hospital, London. "More work needs to be done to shift the awareness level and that is why this week, Heart Valve Disease Awareness Week, is a key step for improved patient outcomes."

Heart valve disease is the name given to any malfunction or abnormality of one or more of the heart's four valves, affecting the flow of blood through the heart.⁶ It is a common, serious, but treatable condition which is particularly associated with ageing. If diagnosed in a timely way, patients can return to a good quality of life, therefore early diagnosis is essential. The condition is usually caused by disease, wear or damage to the heart valve or valves. Key symptoms include chest tightness/pain, abnormal heart beats and shortness of breath.⁶

The advice in place for patients or anyone concerned to report any symptoms. Whilst there may be delays to appointments and treatments, urgent treatment for heart valve disease still needs to be undertaken and the right precautionary measures are in place.

[ENDS]

Heart Valve Disease

Heart valve disease is when one or more of your heart valves become diseased or damaged, affecting the way that blood flows through your heart.

Aortic stenosis is a form of heart valve disease, most often developed due to age-related degeneration or hardening (calcification) of the aortic valve, leading to progressive narrowing (stenosis) - changes which compromise valve function and impair normal blood flow through the heart. The symptoms of aortic stenosis are chest pain, fatigue, shortness of breath, light-headedness, fainting and difficulty exercising.

Heart Valve Disease Awareness Week and European Heart Health Survey

Heart Valve Disease Awareness Week (14-20 September 2020) aims to improve diagnosis, treatment and management of heart valve disease globally. The project is led by the Global Heart Hub, the umbrella group for cardiovascular patient organisations, including; Initiative Herzklappe in Germany, Meine Herzklappe from Austria, Instituto Lado A Lado Pela Vida in Brazil, Alliance du Cœur in France, Cuore

Italia in Italy, Heart Valve Voice in the UK, US, Canada and Japan, AEPOVAC in Spain, PACO from Mexico, Croí, the heart and stroke charity from Ireland, Mended Hearts in the US and Street Doctor in the Netherlands. Heart Valve Disease Awareness Week has been supported with grants from Abbott and Edwards Lifesciences (others tbc), while the European Heart Health Survey was also funded by Edwards Lifesciences.

The European Heart Health Survey was previously conducted in 2015 and 2017. The 2019 Survey was led by a steering committee of healthcare professionals and patient organisation representatives. The aim was to assess public awareness of aortic stenosis and symptoms of heart valve disease, measure the frequency of stethoscope use, understand preferences of treatment and identify the role that over 60s play in society. The Survey was conducted among 12,832 people over the age of 60 across 11 European countries: France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Austria, Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland and the UK (with 1,602 respondents in the UK).

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