

Treatment of Atrial Fibrillation and Prescribing of Warfarin in Primary Care

Atrial Fibrillation is the commonest sustained arrhythmia with a prevalence of 5% of the over 65s in the UK. We know that we are underdiagnosing and under treating atrial fibrillation. More effective screening and the greater use of warfarin will have a significant impact on the number of strokes our patients suffer.

The Hambleton Richmondshire & Whitby Clinical Commissioning Group would encourage all its clinicians to study the North of England Cardiovascular Network AF pathway and fully implement it in their practices. The use of automated BP monitors can mean that fewer pulses are felt. Everyone over the age of 65 should have an annual manual palpation of their pulse. Getting your practice nurses to feel the pulse of every patient attending flu vaccination clinics will uncover at risk patients.

GPs in the Whitby locality are already able to refer for open access echocardiograms and the same facility will shortly be available at the Friarage Hospital. If patients are to be referred to secondary care please do not order an echo, as we will be double charged.

Patients aged over 60 in permanent AF with acceptable or no symptoms can be treated appropriately in primary care. 50% of patients who are cardioverted return to AF within a year & 75% within 4 years.

For older patients in permanent asymptomatic AF the 2 priorities are **rate control** and **anticoagulation**.

We would recommend bisoprolol as the first line b blocker. Increase the dose weekly as clinically indicated, starting at 1.25mg and following the dosage progression 2.5mg, 5mg, 7.5mg and 10mg. Diltiazem is a suitable calcium channel blocker and do not forget that digoxin still has a place in the treatment of AF.

Finally use the CHADS2 score, which will mean more patients, are treated with warfarin. Their risk of stroke is reduced 20% with aspirin but **70% with warfarin**. The Birmingham AF treatment of the aged study showed no significant difference between aspirin & warfarin in both intra-cerebral & extra-cerebral bleeds in elderly patients.