

Third of Atrial Fibrillation patients dissatisfied with treatment

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In a recent survey conducted of over 1,200 patients with Atrial Fibrillation (AF), a potentially lethal heart rhythm disorder, 33% stated that they were not satisfied with their current treatment. Even patients whose current treatment is satisfactory frequently cite tragically-long delays in receiving a diagnosis, suitable care, and again, a referral to a heart rhythm specialist. British Olympian, Debbie Palmer-Green, 36, suffered the debilitating symptoms of AF even when she was competing for Great Britain as a short-track speed skater. Debbie went ten years before receiving a diagnosis. Through all that time she was not only living in the shadow of a cardiac arrhythmia that interfered with her ability to train and compete, her AF also placed her at significantly increased risk of suffering a stroke.

Since receiving a diagnosis and suitable treatment a year ago, Debbie has returned to her sport and is now recovering her fitness. While having retired from Olympic competition, not only will she next month be competing in a skating event at Finland's Ice Marathon, Debbie will be using the gruelling 25 km race to raise funds to help patients with AF.

Debbie says, "Since I was diagnosed with AF I have learnt how to live with the symptoms and deal with the AF episodes, and have been able to start getting back into my 'normal' recreational exercise habits. This marathon represents a big turning point for me in getting back some of my old fitness, feeling healthy and happy again after ten years of living cautiously with anxiety and frightening symptoms."

Professor Richard Schilling, Consultant Cardiologist and Electrophysiologist at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, commented, "Unfortunately, Debbie's experience of delayed diagnosis is not unusual, especially in younger people where AF may not be considered. However, even when a diagnosis is made it can take a long time for patients to get appropriate treatment which the AFA survey confirms. Debbie's case strongly highlights how important a diagnosis can be in order to access treatments which make a huge difference to everyday life."

Dr Andreas Wolff, GP with Special Interest in Cardiology commented, "AF is usually associated with older patients but cardiac arrhythmias, and in particular AF, can occur in athletes. A simple pulse check can help to detect AF. It takes thirty seconds but can save months, or even years of struggling. Sadly, without diagnosis and effective treatment individuals face very unpleasant symptoms and poor quality of life. It is essential that services within the NHS are designed to promote early diagnosis and, when necessary, expert referral to ensure rapid and effective management. A simple pulse check can reverse this and help patients return to a 'normal' life."



News Release

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Notes:

1. The Ice Marathon takes place between February 16-19th 2011 in Kuopios, Finland amid beautiful lake scenery. The 25km skate begins at 1200 on Saturday 19 February 2011
2. Anyone wishing to sponsor Debbie can do so online at the Just Giving website: <http://www.justgiving.com/Debbie-Palmer-Green>
3. AF is the most common heart rhythm disorder affecting [840,000 people across the UK with many more suspected but not diagnosed] It occurs in 1-2% of the general population. More than six million Europeans suffer from this cardiac arrhythmia, and it's estimated to at least double in the next 50 years as the population ages and increasingly survives previously life-threatening conditions. AF confers a five-fold risk of stroke, and between 20-30% of all strokes, in particular the most debilitating and life threatening type, are attributed to this arrhythmia.
4. For additional AF background please visit: www.afa.org.uk