



GolinHarris

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Headline: Free pulse checks for heart disorder

Free pulse checks for heart disorder

FREE pulse checks will be offered across the island this month as the Singapore Heart Foundation (SHF) looks to raise awareness of a disorder that can increase the risk of a fatal stroke by up to eight times.

The Pulse Check Singapore programme kicked off along with Heart Rhythm Week yesterday to get people to look out for early signs of atrial fibrillation (AF) – a heart rhythm disorder.

About 20 per cent of AF ischemic strokes – which block blood supply to the brain – are fatal.

The SHF will hold a free pre-screen testing at a public health talk on Saturday at Toa Payoh Central Community Club.

Free pre-screening, which will measure pulse rate, will also be available at 16 Guardian patient care centres throughout June.

“AF is a potentially dangerous condition that affects roughly 50,000 people in Singapore and can increase eight-fold the risk of a stroke,” said Dr Goh Ping Ping, board member of SHF and senior consultant cardiologist at Cardiac Specialist Centre. “With appropriate treatment, that risk can be substantially reduced, so early diagnosis is vital.”

The risk of AF doubles as one ages every 10 years, said Dr Goh. He added: “Most people do not link an irregular heartbeat to a serious medical condition such as stroke, which could be the reason for widespread low awareness or ignorance about AF, its symptoms and disease burden.”

One of the fastest ways of screening for possible AF is through pulse checks. An irregular heartbeat indicates further tests may be needed to correctly identify the problem. “An irregular heartbeat in older people, who have other risk factors for AF such as high blood pressure, is most often due to AF,” said Dr Reginald Liew, senior consultant cardiologist at The Harley Street Clinic Heart Specialists.

Other symptoms of AF can include fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath or chest pain.

Thyroid problems, inflammation and family history are some factors which contribute to the risk of AF. Treatment options range from medication to a permanent pacemaker.

Everyone over the age of 60 should have regular blood pressure and heart rate checks to detect AF early, said Dr Liew.

RACHEL TAN