

## **Irish Policy Makers Join the Call for the Prevention of Atrial Fibrillation-Related Strokes to be Made a National Healthcare Priority**

*Urgent Need to Reduce the Devastating Personal and Economic Impact of these Severe Strokes*

**Brussels, Belgium – October 24, 2012** – Ahead of World Stroke Day 2012 (October 29), four cross party Irish Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have joined many other EU policy makers as well as over 90 Medical and Patient Organisations, and more than 100,000 people, in supporting the Global Atrial Fibrillation (AF) Patient Charter and calling for National Governments and the World Health Organisation to act to make the prevention of AF-related strokes a priority. The Charter outlines ways to improve the diagnosis and management of AF which, if implemented, could stop thousands of preventable strokes from occurring each and every year.

### **Why Action is Needed Now?**

This is an epidemic already in progress, in Europe alone ten million people are affected by AF – the most common sustained abnormal heart rhythm. However, an increasingly ageing population means that the number of Europeans affected is expected to rise to 25 to 30 million by 2050. This is very worrying because people with AF are five times more likely to experience a stroke than those without AF. Furthermore, these strokes are more severe than those that are unrelated to AF and therefore more costly in terms of impact on individuals and health and social services budgets.

*“Up to three million people worldwide have a stroke related to Atrial Fibrillation every year - that is one person every 12 seconds,”* said Irish MEP Liam Aylward. *“People with AF are 5 times more likely to have a stroke compared to the general population. Many of these strokes can be prevented.”*

*“Awareness of Atrial Fibrillation is very low. Also, just as elsewhere in Europe, the detection and management of AF in Ireland is poor and the management of AF offers a real opportunity to reduce the number of people having strokes,”* underlined fellow Irish MEP Jim Higgins.

The financial burden placed on European countries by stroke is huge. In 2010, the estimated cost of stroke in Europe was €64 billion. Assuming that 15% of these strokes were caused by AF and that they are generally more severe, the cost of AF-related stroke could be at least €10 billion in 2010 alone.

The personal impact for AF-related stroke survivors and their families cannot be underestimated with more than a third of survivors returning home with some level of permanent disability. AF also increases the risk of medical complications following a stroke with survivors suffering more frequently from conditions such as pneumonia and accumulation of fluid in the lungs.

**Strokes are Preventable: Prevent Them!**

However, the majority of these strokes are preventable. Whilst there is no quick or easy solution, there are steps that can be taken to improve awareness, detection, diagnosis and management of AF to reduce the number of people whose lives are devastated every year.

*“The Irish government should work together with Medical and Patient Organisations to make AF-related stroke prevention and care a national healthcare priority and put in place national stroke prevention plans,”* said Irish MEP Marian Harkin. *“We should all do our best to increase access to education, early diagnosis of AF and appropriate management to prevent AF-related strokes in Ireland.”*

**A Worldwide Unified Voice**

The Global AF Patient Charter is supported by over 90 Medical and Patient Organisations around the world. Its supporting campaign, *Sign Against Stroke in Atrial Fibrillation*, is calling for individuals around the world to sign their names on [SignAgainstStroke.com](http://SignAgainstStroke.com) to demonstrate their support for the Charter and ask National Governments to implement its recommendations to prevent AF-related strokes.

*“Over 100,000 policy makers, healthcare professionals, patients, their families and members of the general public have supported the Global AF Patient Charter,”* commented, Irish MEP and former nurse Phil Prendergast. *“This rapidly increasing support is a great demonstration of how important it is that AF-related stroke is prevented and with this support we can trigger change.”*

**About The Global AF Patient Charter and *Sign Against Stroke* Campaign**

The Global AF Patient Charter has been developed by a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from Patient Organisations, including AntiCoagulation Europe, Arrhythmia Alliance, Atrial Fibrillation Association, Irish Heart Foundation, StopAfib.org and Stroke Alliance for Europe, in collaboration with 39 founding Patient Organisations from 20 countries. A full listing of collaborating organisations is available on the website, [www.signagainststroke.com](http://www.signagainststroke.com).

People can learn about AF and stroke, read and sign the Charter, which is available in 22 languages, and hear what policy makers have to say on the Campaign website, [www.signagainststroke.com](http://www.signagainststroke.com). All signatures contribute to driving action to prevent AF-related strokes and improving future outcomes and quality of life of people diagnosed with AF.

The website also features videos of Irish and other Members of the European Parliament from different political groups and countries who have come together to explain how to improve the diagnosis and management of AF and to urge national governments to make the prevention of AF-related strokes a national healthcare priority.

Bayer HealthCare is proud to support the Global AF Patient Charter and *Sign Against Stroke* Campaign.

**Media Contacts**

Melissa Gonzalez  
Email: [m.gonzalez@togorun.net](mailto:m.gonzalez@togorun.net)  
Tel: +1 (212) 453 2047