

## **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), European Policy Makers have joined 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.

***“I think it is very important that National Ministries of Health throughout the 27 European Member States pay attention to the Global AF Patient Charter,”*** said Member of the European Parliament’s Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee Dr Cristian Silviu Buşoi. ***“The Charter recommendations could help governments achieve the aims of the European Heart Health Charter and the recently adopted United Nations target to reduce Non Communicable Disease mortality by 25% by the year 2025. This could limit the human trauma and substantial impact on health budgets caused by AF-related strokes. ”***

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.

*“National governments 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 Member of the European Parliament’s Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee Edite Estrela. *“We should all do our best to increase access to education, early diagnosis of AF and appropriate management to prevent AF- related strokes.”*

### **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.

*“I am so excited to see the rapidly increasing support for the Global AF Patient Charter,”* said Trudie Lobban MBE, Founder and Trustee, Arrhythmia Alliance, and Co-Founder and CEO, Atrial Fibrillation Association. *“Over 100,000 policy makers, healthcare professionals, patients, their families and members of the general public have supported the Charter by signing their names at [SignAgainstStroke.com](http://SignAgainstStroke.com). This is a demonstration of how important it is that AF-related stroke is prevented and with this support we can drive 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.

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

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