



INNOVATION AGENCY
Academic Health Science Network
for the North West Coast

ATRIAL FIBRILLATION AMBASSADORS

Summary

A team of volunteers has been recruited in the North West Coast to help spot friends, colleagues and relatives at risk of a stroke. They are the Innovation Agency's AF Ambassadors, who are using portable ECG devices to identify people who may have atrial fibrillation (AF) – an irregular heart beat which can lead to a life-threatening stroke.

The AF Ambassador role has been created by the Innovation Agency, in partnership with the Stroke Association, to prevent strokes – saving lives and avoiding life-changing disabilities.

Why is this important?

The North West has one of the highest AF related stroke rates in the UK. Each stroke is potentially life-threatening and those caused by AF could be avoided through the correct medication.

It is estimated that in the North West Coast region there are over 20,000 people who have AF but are either not identified or not well managed.

In the North West Coast alone, our initiative is expected to identify over 1,000 new cases of atrial fibrillation over the next two years, which could prevent up to 34 strokes and save more than £750,000 in associated health care costs.



AF Ambassador Kim Hughes (left) tests Sarah Oldnall

The challenge

The challenge is to overcome low awareness of the risks of stroke from undiagnosed AF and the importance of pulse testing to identify an irregular heart rhythm.

This testing can be carried out very simply using one of a number of portable ECG devices available through the Innovation Agency and its fellow Academic Health Science Networks.

Actions taken

By June 2018, the Innovation Agency had recruited 35 AF Ambassadors. The Ambassadors were each tasked with testing 50 people in their first year, however, many have tested considerably more.

The Ambassadors have been trained and issued with Kardia devices - portable Electrocardiogram (ECG) monitors which are used with a mobile smartphone or tablet and display a heart trace on the Kardia app.

Anyone with a positive result is advised to consult their GP and the volunteer can give the trace to that individual. The Ambassadors report their findings to the Innovation Agency's AF team on a quarterly basis.

Plans for the future

The Innovation Agency is actively recruiting more volunteers to become AF Ambassadors to test people's pulses in their communities throughout the North West Coast.

Anyone who would like to get involved should call:

Patient and Public Involvement Lead
Debbie Parkinson on 01772 520250
or email: debbie.parkinson@innovationagencynwc.nhs.uk

Impacts

The AF Ambassadors are spreading the word about AF and raising awareness in their workplaces, families and communities, which is leading to more people being diagnosed with AF and being provided with treatment which will prevent strokes.

From July 2017 to June 2018, the Ambassadors have tested around 700 pulses – identifying 48 people with possible AF and advised them to see a GP, avoiding potential strokes.

Testimonials

Stroke survivor Kim Hughes is an AF Ambassador carrying out pulse checks at The Brain Charity and The Walton Centre where she volunteers.

She said:

"It's not easy getting over a stroke, so if I can help to prevent just one person having one, then it's worth it every time."

AF Ambassador Julie Parker, an Independent Living Coordinator for Johnnie Johnson Housing, said:

"I am very impressed with how quick and easy it is to operate and how useful and beneficial this is to the whole community.

"It will help save lives and enable people to live longer and have a better quality of life. Plus, it saves the NHS time and money which can be used for other patients with different ailments."

June 2018

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Dr Julia Reynolds, Head of Programmes
Email: julia.reynolds@innovationagency.nhs.uk
Tel: 07852 562791

innovationagencynwc.nhs.uk

[@innovationnwc](https://twitter.com/innovationnwc)

 Like us on Facebook: InnovationNWC