

Towards a better education of patients with atrial fibrillation: the initiative of the Polish Cardiac Society

To the Editor Atrial fibrillation (AF) is the most common cardiac arrhythmia treated in everyday practice. The management of patients with AF is usually multidirectional and includes lifestyle modification and treatment of the underlying diseases such as arterial hypertension or coronary artery disease, symptom improvement (rhythm or ventricular rate control), and, above all, prevention of thromboembolic complications (primarily stroke).

In this integrated care, the patient should have a central role. For the treatment of AF to be effective, patients have to change their lifestyles and adhere to chronic therapy. In many cases, the therapy does not show an immediate benefit; therefore, patients need to understand their responsibility in the management of this potentially fatal or disabling disease. Physicians and other health care professionals are responsible for providing access to evidence-based therapy, but many choices (anticoagulation, cardioversion, antiarrhythmics, AF ablation) and adherence to therapy are ultimately based on the preferences of patients. Hence, access to information and education of patients (and often also of their partners and relatives) are indispensable to encourage patients' self-management and active involvement in the therapy, engage them in shared decision making, and support their understanding of the disease and recommended treatment. These actions should be based on a conversation between the treating physician and his or her patient. However, due to the busy time schedules in outpatient clinics, it is not always possible to provide the patient with comprehensive information and to respond to all questions arising during the ambulatory visit. Therefore, other forms of patient education are necessary and strongly supported by scientific societies.

One of the modern sources of knowledge are various forms of e-learning. There are a number of educational websites, but they do not always offer up-to-date knowledge. The Polish Cardiac Society, in pursuit of its statutory tasks, has taken up initiatives directed not only at educating physicians but also patients. For patients with AF and their families, the website www.arytmiagroziudarem.pl

was launched in September 2016. It contains information on the characteristic features and causes of AF, its symptoms and complications, diagnostic methods, and principles of treatment. It also features data on anticoagulation, antiarrhythmic drugs, and AF ablation, which come in a user-friendly but not oversimplified form and are useful both for patients and their families. The website has been available for several months. During this time, a large number of questions and responses prepared by experts in the field were collected and published. There has been a great interest in the website, as evidenced by the number of visitors—over 250 000 and still increasing.

Patients with AF are treated not only by cardiologists but also (and perhaps predominantly in Poland and many other countries) by internists or general practitioners. With this letter to the editor, I would like to spread knowledge on the www.arytmiagroziudarem.pl website among physicians. The website is available to all Polish-speaking patients diagnosed with AF. Let us remember that in Poland there are approximately 600 000 to 700 000 patients with AF. The well-informed patients with AF are likely to be more compliant with the prescribed therapeutic regimen, and this will likely translate into a lower risk of stroke and its severe sequelae.

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