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Service Development and Screening



Newsletter of the Northern Ireland Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening Programme

Issue 1: November 2011 Produced by the PHA for healthcare professionals

Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the Northern Ireland Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening Programme newsletter. The aim of the AAA screening programme is to reduce AAA-related mortality by providing a systematic, population-based screening programme.

Background

In November 2009, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) endorsed a UK National Screening Committee recommendation that AAA screening be offered to men aged 65 and over. During 2010/11 the Department tasked the Public Health Agency (PHA), working with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and Truists, to begin preparatory work for its introduction.

Why screen?

There is evidence of a significant reduction (45%) in mortality from AAA in those men aged between 65 to 79 years who undergo ultrasound screening. There is also evidence of the long-term cost-effectiveness of AAA screening in men and further evidence that the early mortality benefit from screening is maintained.

AAAs are normally asymptomatic but approximately one third will rupture, with those larger than 55mm in diameter carrying the greatest risk. Mortality following rupture is high. Around 50% of those who suffer a ruptured aortic aneurysm die before reaching hospital.

Of those who undergo emergency repair the mortality rate is between 30% and 70%. However, elective repair (either open or endovascular) of AAA has a much lower post-operative mortality rate (3% to 8%).

The screening population

A single screening programme will cover the whole of Northern Ireland. The target population will be men aged 65; older men will be able to self-refer. Uptake is expected to be 80%.

Process of screening

Men will receive an invitation leaflet, with an appointment, three weeks in advance. Screening will consist of a single examination of the abdominal aorta by ultrasound scan. Results will be provided verbally immediately after the scan and by post shortly afterwards.

Outcomes of screening

Men identified as having no aneurysm (diameter of aorta less than 30mm) will be discharged from the programme. Men diagnosed with a small or medium aneurysm (between 30mm and 54mm) will be kept under surveillance within the programme, and men diagnosed with a larger aneurysm (greater than or equal to 55mm) will be referred to the vascular service.

Further information

Work is underway on preparing a local AAA screening website. In the meantime, further information is available on the NHS AAA Screening Programme website at: <http://aaa.screening.nhs.uk>

Dr Adrian Mairs
Consultant in Public Health Medicine, FRCS, MRCP, FPH

Who is it for?	Risk factors	Fact
All men registered with a GP should be offered AAA screening during the year in which they turn 65. Men over 65 will be able to request a screening appointment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Older age• Male• Smoker• Hypertension• Other vascular diseases• Positive family history of AAA	Around 5–10% of men aged between 65 and 79 years have an abdominal aortic aneurysm (3–4% at age 65 years).

Since implementation in 2012, the NI AAA Screening Programme has produced a newsletter (generally bi-annually).

The aim of the newsletter is to provide an update – particularly to primary care staff – on programme delivery across the region and the role of GPs, practice managers and practice nurses in helping to support this.

The newsletter covers many topics including: profiles of key staff, service user engagement activities, the latest performance data and the wide range of information materials available upon request to the programme office.

The latest issue is sent electronically to all GP practices across Northern Ireland with a printed version also being sent for programme promotion purposes to the general public.

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Target group

Healthcare professionals

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