University's research informs new cardiology treatment guidelines for atrial fibrillation

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New European guidelines on the treatment of atrial fibrillation now include risk assessment tools developed by the University of Birmingham which could lead to improvements in stroke prevention for patients with this common condition.

The European Society of Cardiology clinical guidelines now include the CHA2DS2-VASc and HAS-BLED risk scores for assessing stroke and bleeding risk which were devised and validated by researchers at the University's Centre for Cardiovascular Sciences. The aim of these tools is to help to improve clinical decision-making when doctors treat people with atrial fibrillation.

Atrial fibrillation affects around six million people across Europe and can result in stroke if anticoagulation (treatment with blood-thinning drugs) is not used when needed. These risk assessment tools allow clinicians to assess the risk of stroke and bleeding when effective anticoagulation drugs, such as warfarin, are prescribed.

Professor Gregory Y H Lip, Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at the University who led the development and validation of the two new risk scores, said:

'Doctors need simple risk assessment tools when evaluating a patient with atrial fibrillation. The CHA2DS2-VASc and HAS-BLED scores in the guidance reflect the emphasis on improving decision-making for stroke prevention in patients with atrial fibrillation, given the benefits of oral anticoagulation therapy in this setting.

'The new guidelines will also mean that more patients will require anticoagulation. With the availability of new drugs that overcome the disadvantages of warfarin, more patients with atrial fibrillation will be able to reap the benefits of stroke prevention with oral anticoagulation therapy. The new risk scores will clearly help everyday management of such patients.'

For further information, please contact the Press Office, University of Birmingham, Tel 0121 414 5134.

Notes to Editors

* The CHA2DS2-VASc and HAS-BLED risk scores are known as the 'Birmingham AF stroke risk schema' and 'Birmingham AF bleeding risk score' respectively.

* Atrial fibrillation is the most common cardiac rhythm disorder which can lead to stroke or heart failure if not correctly treated. There is a one in four lifetime risk of a person developing atrial fibrillation. Atrial fibrillation increases the risk of stroke five-fold, and such strokes are associated with a higher mortality and substantial disability.

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* The University contributes £662 million to the City of Birmingham and £779 million to the West Midlands region, with an annual income of more than £388.6 million.

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