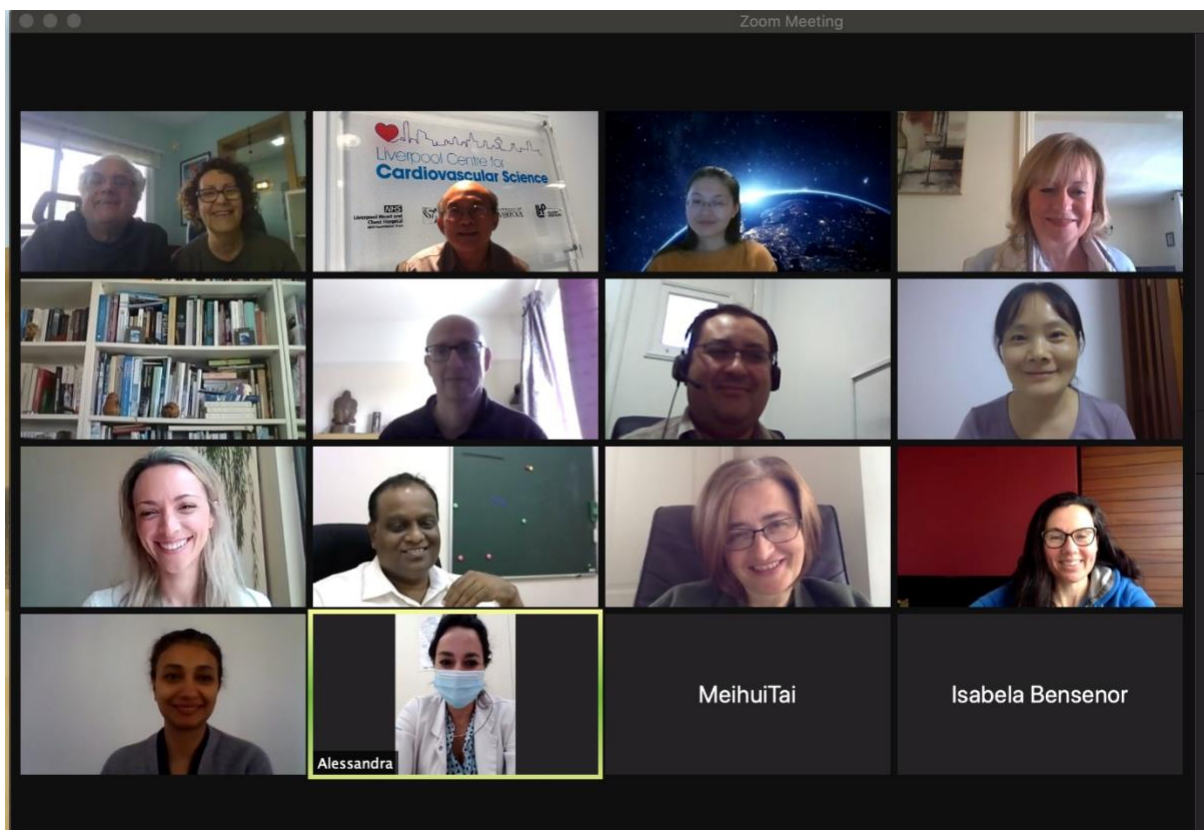# NIHR Global Health Research Group on Atrial Fibrillation management

Newsletter December 2020

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is the most common heart rhythm disorder globally and is a major cause of morbidity and mortality - 25% of strokes are due to AF and adults have a 1 in 4 lifetime risk of developing AF. The NIHR Global Health Research Group on Atrial Fibrillation Management is led by Professors Gregory Lip and Neil Thomas and they have formed partnerships with three countries – Brazil, China and Sri Lanka. Using their knowledge and previous experience they plan to support the partners in these countries to develop tailored research to improve AF management with the aim of reducing AF-associated stroke which is common, yet under-diagnosed /treated in these settings.

We held our 3rd Annual General meeting in September – for the first time we were unable to meet face to face due to COVID travel restrictions, but instead held a 2-day virtual meeting. Despite the restrictions that virtual meetings can bring, it was a great success and we managed to have great idea development sessions to formulate plans for how the Group will move forward in future years. Let's hope that travel restrictions will be lifted sometime in 2021 and that we will be able to meet face to face again!

Research news

The team in Sri Lanka are making great progress with collecting data on the patient pathway of AF. They have completed interviews and observations with primary care doctors and are now visiting with AF patients in the community to find out how they receive care and support for AF. The Sri Lanka team are also in the beginning stages of carrying out two systematic reviews.

The Brazilian team have been busy writing several manuscripts for submitting to peer reviewed journals. They are also finishing up data collection from AF patients to identify the patient pathway for AF. Due to the covid-19 pandemic, patient focus groups were put on hold but the team in Brazil are hopeful they can continue with these soon.

Focus Group Work

The Brazilian team have done the first focus group before the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the proposed guidelines were followed with a good dynamic among 7 participants from one of the Primary Care Unities located in the region of Butantan, São Paulo. Participants demonstrated interest in giving their impression about AF, including the impact of AF on the patient's routine and daily life. They talked with a lot of spontaneity about their AF history.

In China the team have been busy analysing the transcripts of four focus groups that have been conducted in Beijing.

Figure: Health Care Units in the Butantan district.

PPI – Patient and Public Involvement

The Brazilian team have initiated some PPI activities. The central idea is to involve patients and other members of the public in several stages of the research project not only as participants but also as partners in the design of future studies, identification of priorities, data collection, dissemination of findings, and so forth. They started interviewing a sample of 8 participants to understand their willingness to be involved in the study and their perceptions on how their insights might help in the care of other patients.

The Sri Lanka team have been very active in reaching out to and involving individuals in the local communities. They are working to integrate the community into all stages of the research. A trained and dedicated team have developed a strong rapport with the participants. The participants are supportive and interested; they understand the benefits of the research for the society and health system. Successful forums have taken place where the participants, volunteers, research team and other stakeholders are present.

UK News

Two new members of staff have joined the UK team to support colleagues in Brazil, China and Sri Lanka –

Tiffany Gooden has joined the University of Birmingham as a Research Fellow. Tiffany has a background working in maternal and child global health and patient-centred care. She has already been working closely with the teams in both Sri Lanka and Brazil on the patient pathway studies and will also be the social media champion for the whole project. As the NIHR training lead for the Global AF group, Tiffany will also be helping with the capacity building and training plan for the project.

Dr Wahbi El-Bouri has joined the University of Liverpool as Tenure Track Fellow in CV Data Science, working with Professor Gregory Lip, Co-Director of Global AF Reach who is Price-Evans Chair of Cardiovascular Medicine at the University of Liverpool. Wahbi has expertise in in-silico modelling and ML/AI, having spent previous years developing in-silico models of the cerebral vasculature at the University of Oxford. Wahbi will be working with our global colleagues to assist in the preparation of publications and is already working with the team in Brazil.

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