



NEWS RELEASE

New Survey on Heart Valve Disease, Shows Low Levels of Awareness could be Putting Health of 1 Million Over 65 years At Risk

- New survey data highlights that 94% of the over 60s in the UK do not know what aortic stenosis is, and less than 3% say heart valve disease is the condition that gives them significant concern compared to other illnesses¹
- This is despite annual mortality of untreated and severe aortic stenosis being considerably higher than most cancers^{2*} and approximately 1 million people over 65 years of age are thought to suffer from heart valve disease in the UK³
- Additionally, 72% of over 60s reported that they rarely, or never, have their hearts listened to by a doctor¹

LONDON, 26 May 2016 - The UK's over 60s could be seriously jeopardising their health through poor awareness of heart valve disease says the UK charity Heart Valve Voice, as a new survey of 1,411 UK over 60s highlighted a worrying lack of concern about the disease.

Results of the survey reveal that 94% of respondents do not know what the most common heart valve disease, aortic stenosis, is and less than 3% say heart valve disease is the condition that gives them significant concern compared to other illnesses (with 25% most concerned by cancer and 22% about Alzheimer's). This is despite annual mortality of severe aortic stenosis being considerably higher than most cancers^{2*} and heart valve disease affecting approximately one million people over 65 years of age in the UK.³ Over 60s are most familiar with other heart conditions such as heart attacks (59%), angina (42%) and coronary heart disease (38%) with only 7% familiar with heart valve disease.¹

“Many over 65s mistakenly believe the symptoms of breathlessness, fatigue and chest pains are due to ageing,” said Mr Chris Young, Chair of Heart Valve Voice and Cardiothoracic Surgeon, Guys' & St Thomas' Hospital, London. *“By not being aware and seeking diagnosis, they are putting their health at risk when heart valve replacement can restore them to good health.”*

Additionally, almost three-quarters (72%) of over 60s claim that their doctor rarely or never checks their heart with a stethoscope,¹ despite this being one of the first steps to



detect heart valve disease.⁴ In addition, the survey found a disparity amongst the sexes, with 14% of men versus 6.5% of women saying they are checked with a stethoscope at every doctor visit,¹ and 17% of men compared with 30% of women who are never checked.¹

“Patients are not being diagnosed early enough and are ‘slipping through the net’ at all stages of the treatment pathway; in primary care and within secondary care due to lack of education, awareness and incorrect referrals. We are working hard to change this status quo. The more we listen, the more lives we save” added Mr Young.

Encouragingly, although knowledge of heart valve disease is low, after receiving additional information about the condition, 66% of over 60s are more concerned about aortic stenosis and 31% say they would seek further information; 7% of the respondents even recognize symptoms of the disease in themselves.¹

Heart valve disease is a common, but treatable, heart condition where the heart valves no longer work properly. When the valves are diseased it can rapidly affect the pumping action of blood around the body. However, many patients do not suffer severe or visible symptoms, or put their symptoms down to the natural ageing process, making diagnosis difficult. It is important to diagnose early as, if severe aortic stenosis is left untreated, half of those patients will die within two years of developing symptoms.⁶

Epidemiological studies have shown that more than 13%⁵ of over 75s suffer from some form of heart valve disease and between 2-7% of over 65s⁶ suffer with severe aortic stenosis; the most common form of heart valve disease in developed countries.⁷ The UK’s ageing population⁸ means that the number of people with heart valve disease is set to increase, with the over 65 population set to nearly double by 2050.⁸

There is an urgent need for improved awareness of heart valve disease and its effective treatments amongst patients and doctors, given the reported rare use of a stethoscope examination in over 60s, which could aid in its diagnosis. Using a stethoscope to listen to the heart is one of the simplest steps that doctors can take towards diagnosis. A doctor can listen for a characteristic heart ‘murmur’ that is usually the first indication of a problem with the heart valves at regular health checks. Further diagnostic tests can then be undertaken, ranging from electrocardiography (recording the heart’s electrical activity) through to echocardiography (ultrasound of the heart). There are treatments which are



very effective at treating symptoms, improving life expectancy and helping patients return to a normal life.

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About Heart Valve Voice

Heart Valve Voice is a patient-physician charity for people with heart valve disease. Heart Valve Voice's mission is to improve the *diagnosis*, *treatment* and *management* of heart valve disease by raising *awareness* of its severity and the need for timely detection to ensure all patients receive the right treatment at the right time. '*The more we listen, the more lives we save.*' For more information visit www.heartvalvevoice.com and follow us on Twitter @heartvalvevoice and like our Facebook page.

About Heart Valve Disease

Heart valve disease is the name given to any malfunction or abnormality of one or more of the heart's four valves, affecting the blood flow through the heart. The condition is usually caused by wear, disease or damage of the heart valve(s). Commonly reported signs and symptoms of heart valve disease include shortness of breath on exertion, chest tightness and/or pain, palpitations, fatigue, dizziness and fainting.

About Aortic Stenosis

Aortic stenosis, a form of heart valve disease, is most often due to age-related degeneration or hardening (calcification) of the aortic valve, leading to progressive narrowing (stenosis) or leakage (regurgitation) - changes which compromise valve function and impair normal blood flow through the heart.⁹

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References

*Using constant hazard ratio

¹ Opinion Matters. Aortic valve stenosis - What do people know? A Heart Valve Disease Awareness Survey of over 8,800 people aged 60 or over. Survey carried out 28/09/2015 - 12/10/2015. Data on file. Survey funded by Edwards Lifesciences.

² National Cancer Institute. SEER Cancer Stat Fact Sheets. Seercancer.gov. Available at: <http://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/>. Accessed 23 March 2016

³ The changing burden of heart valve disease. British Cardiovascular Society. https://www.bcs.com/pages/news_full.asp?NewsID=19792059 Accessed: 10 March 2016

⁴ Heart valve disease. Bupa. <http://www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information/directory/h/heart-valve-disease> Accessed: 10 March 2016.

⁵ Nkomo V *et al.* Burden of valvular heart disease: a population-based study. *Lancet*. 2006;**368**:1005-11.



⁶ Spaccarotella C *et al.* Pathophysiology of aortic stenosis and approach to treatment with percutaneous valve implantation. *Circulation Journal*. 2011;**75**:11-19.

⁷ Lindroos M *et al.* Prevalence of aortic valve abnormalities in the elderly: an echocardiographic study of a random population sample. *J Am Coll Cardiol* 1993;**21**:1220-5.

⁸ Political challenges related to an aging population. Key issues for the 2015 parliament. Available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/key-issues-parliament-2015/social-change/ageing-population/> Accessed 23 March 2016.

⁹ Patient.co.uk. Available at: <http://patient.info/health/aortic-stenosis-leaflet>. Accessed 23 March 2016.