Atrial Fibrillation: Patient Education

Search date
20/04/2022

Author
Kylie Porritt BN, GradDipNursSc(Cardiac), MNSc, PhD
updated by Sandeep Moola BDS MPhil PhD

Publication date
25/05/2022

Question
What is the best available evidence regarding the effectiveness of patient education to patients with atrial fibrillation (AF)?

Clinical Bottom Line
Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a common and clinically significant cardiac arrhythmia associated with mortality and increased risk of stroke as the patient ages.¹,²,³,⁴ Atrial fibrillation increases the risk of stroke and may also weaken the heart and lead to heart failure, therefore it is important that people with AF are diagnosed, treated and adhere to their treatment regimens.¹ Poor knowledge and awareness of the risks associated with AF has been associated with poor adherence to treatment in people diagnosed with the condition.¹,²,³,⁴ The provision of patient education is viewed as a core component of the care and management of patients with AF.

- A systematic review was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of educational and behavioral interventions for oral anticoagulation therapy (OAT) on the primary outcome of time in therapeutic range (TTR) in patients with AF. Several interventions were evaluated including education, decision aids, self-monitoring and educational interventions; duration of the interventions varied from a one off 30 to 60 minutes to three to four session lasting 30 to 120 minutes. The evidence remains uncertain in regard to the effect of self-monitoring plus education on TTR; there was a small but positive effect of education on anxiety and depression (based on low quality evidence); and the effect of decision aids on decision conflict favored usual care (based on low quality evidence).¹ (Level 1)

- A systematic review examined the effect of educational interventions delivered to patients with AF on a range of outcomes includes serious adverse events, self-reported incidence of AF and quality of life, anxiety, depression and physical capacity. Educational interventions were delivered as part of a wider management plan for patients with AF and included educational group-based sessions including educational booklets, self-monitoring diaries and worksheets; nurse-led education including psychological support; cognitive behavioral therapy; cardiac rehabilitation program with a psycho-educational component and education delivered as part of an integrated management approach. The findings indicated the provision of education lowered the incidence of serious adverse events, decreased anxiety and depression, improved quality of life and physical capacity; no differences were observed in self-reported symptoms of AF⁵ (Level 1)

- Clinical guidelines highlight the importance of providing structured, tailored education to patients with AF throughout all phases of AF management and recommend that education focuses on the disease, symptom recognition, therapy, modifiable risk factors of AF and self-management activities.³,⁴ (Level 5)
The European Society of Cardiology (ESC) guidelines state that although several resources were available on patient education, the strategy alone was insufficient to produce and maintain medication adherence and lifestyle modifications.5 (Level 5)

Characteristics Of The Evidence
This evidence summary is based on a structured search of the literature and selected evidence-based health care databases. The evidence in this summary comes from:

- A systematic review of 11 randomized controlled trials including 2,246 participants with AF.1
- A systematic review including nine RCTs and one non-RCT (of which three RCTs and the one non-RCT were included from two systematic review focusing on the same topic); with a total of 2,368 participants.2
- Evidence-based clinical practice guidelines.3,4,5

Best Practice Recommendations
1. Structured, tailored education should be provided to patients with AF throughout all phases of AF management (including a focus on disease, symptom recognition, therapy, modifiable risk factors of AF and self-management activities. (Grade A)

References

Archived Publications
1. JBI-ES-2822-1 (Published at 10 April 2021)