

Canberra pharmacists put nation's politicians to the pulse test

Canberra pharmacists joined with Hearts4Heart today to perform pulse-testing on Federal Parliamentarians as part of a national campaign to prevent potentially fatal strokes.

Politicians who had their pulse and heart rate tested by Canberra pharmacist Bev Mistry-Cable include Senator David Van and Rob Mitchell MP.

The initiative forms as part of Atrial Fibrillation Awareness Week (16-22 September) which aims to address alarmingly low levels of testing for atrial fibrillation, a heart condition that increases the risk of stroke five-fold.

"Pharmacists are perfectly placed to identify an irregular heartbeat, which is the critical first step to preventing what could be a catastrophic stroke," said Ms. Mistry-Cable from Cooleman Court Pharmacy in Weston, ACT.

"People will often seek advice from pharmacists, and this is an ideal opportunity to detect early warning signs of what could be atrial fibrillation. Early detection and timely referral can make a significant difference," she said.

An irregular heartbeat known as atrial fibrillation can cause blood clots to form in a chamber of the heart which can then travel to the brain, causing a stroke. It is estimated that one-in-four strokes occur in people with atrial fibrillation, with most of these people finding out they have it after suffering a stroke.

"We don't want a stroke to be the first time any Australian discovers they have an irregular heartbeat. Pulse and heart-rate testing is quick, it's simple and could ultimately save lives," said Tanya Hall, CEO of Hearts4Heart and an atrial fibrillation patient herself.

Experts say that early diagnosis must be matched by long-term use of medication that can reduce the risk of stroke by up to 70 per cent. However, a new analysis for Hearts4Heart reveals that around 25 per cent of people prescribed anticoagulation medicine discontinue therapy within 12 months

"This is alarming. We need to ensure people diagnosed with atrial fibrillation understand why they need to continue taking the medication over the long term," Ms. Hall said.

More than 25 pharmacies across the nation are teaming up with Hearts4Heart and offering free pulse and heart rate testing during the awareness week which began on 16 September and continues through to Sunday, 22 September.

Ends#

For further information or to arrange an interview please contact John Morton at Ethical Strategies on 0416 184 044 or Orla Tomlinson on 0430 962 008.