

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

NEW HEART PROCEDURE TO REDUCE RISK OF STROKE IN HIGH RISK PATIENTS WITH IRREGULAR HEART RATE

- First in Asia
- Alternative therapy for stroke prevention in atrial fibrillation patients at high risk of taking warfarin long term
- Reduces haemorrhagic stroke risk with all-cause stroke and all-cause mortality outcomes comparable to warfarin treatment, shown in overseas clinical trial study

Singapore, 2 December 2009 - The National Heart Centre Singapore (新加坡国家心脏中心) performed Asia's first percutaneous closure of the left atrial appendage using the Watchman device on 12 October 2009. The device, which looks like a mini parachute, is permanently implanted in high-risk patients with atrial fibrillation, to prevent them from having a stroke caused by blood clots in the heart.

Atrial fibrillation is a heart condition in which the heart beats irregularly. It can cause blood to stagnate and form clots in the left atrial appendage of the heart, which increases one's chances of having a stroke or other related problems. Currently, to prevent blood clots from forming, doctors use a drug commonly known as warfarin. However a possible side effect could be bleeding, especially in patients 65 years old and above. Reported rates of major bleeding range from 1.1 per cent to 8.1 per cent for each year of warfarin treatment. In addition, it is difficult to maintain within the narrow therapeutic range due to multiple drug interactions and requires frequent monitoring and dose adjustments. Published reports indicate that less than 50 per cent of eligible patients are being treated with warfarin due to tolerance or non-compliance issues.

70-year-old Cheong Ching Chuan was the first to undergo this new procedure on 12 October 2009 by Associate Professor Koh Tian Hai, Medical Director, National Heart Centre Singapore and Associate Professor Lim Soo Teik, Head and Senior Consultant, Department of Cardiology, National Heart Centre Singapore. A retiree, Mr Cheong has long term atrial



fibrillation and is at high risk of stroke. He was on long term warfarin therapy to prevent stroke. However this was discontinued after he developed haematoma in the brain when he accidentally knocked his head twice in August and September 2009. As an alternative therapy for stroke prevention, his doctors recommended this new procedure to him. After the two-hour procedure, Mr Cheong was discharged after a six-day stay in the hospital and has not experienced any bleeding since.

“People with atrial fibrillation usually have a higher risk of stroke, up to five times that of the general population, especially if they have more than two risk factors such as advanced age, hypertension or diabetes. With this Watchman device closure of the left atrial appendage, it provides an alternative therapy for stroke prevention in patients at high risk of taking warfarin long term,” said Associate Professor Koh.

Trial findings from PROTECT-AF, a multi-centre overseas study conducted in 707 atrial fibrillation patients showed that in those who were candidates for warfarin therapy, device closure of the left atrial appendage using the Watchman device was associated with a reduction in haemorrhagic stroke risk versus warfarin, and all-cause stroke and all-cause mortality outcomes were comparable to warfarin. Of the patients receiving the device, 86 per cent were able to stop warfarin therapy. The combined rate of stroke and cardiovascular death was 3.4 per 100 patient-years in the device group versus 5.0 in the warfarin group.

In Singapore, atrial fibrillation occurs in about 0.5 to – 1 per cent of the general population. Its prevalence increases with age as seen in 5 per cent of patients 65 years old and above, and 10 per cent in patients 80 years old and above. It has been estimated that the number of patients with atrial fibrillation will increase 2.5-fold over the next 50 years.

Each year, the centre estimates up to 100 atrial fibrillation patients at higher risk of stroke would be suitable for this new therapy.

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About the National Heart Centre Singapore

The National Heart Centre Singapore (新加坡国家心脏中心) is a 185-bed national and regional referral centre for cardiovascular diseases. A one-stop facility with the largest heart specialists group in Singapore, NHCS treats complex cases and sees the highest volume of heart patients locally.

Each year, the centre handles over 90,000 outpatient consultations, 6,000 interventional and surgical procedures and 9,000 inpatients. Its outcomes for heart attack treatment, balloon angioplasty with stenting and coronary bypass surgery have been shown to be equivalent to international standards.

NHCS is the first heart centre outside USA and in Asia to receive the prestigious Joint Commission International (JCI) since 2005, which is an assurance for safe and quality patient care for the patients.