

Improving management of atrial fibrillation with rapid ventricular response

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“Improving the management of atrial fibrillation (AF) with rapid ventricular response” was a clinical project undertaken by St Vincent's Emergency Department (ED) in 2013 to reduce variation in clinical practise and confusion in decision making often associated with this condition. The project was co-ordinated by the Department of Health (DoH) and the Emergency Care Improvement and Innovation Clinical Network (ECIICN).

The project aims were:

1. Develop and implement a local clinical pathway for the management of AF
2. Clear documentation of chronicity and duration of symptoms
3. Document a CHADS 2 score for patients with AF who are not already on warfarin and have a rate control strategy.

Based on evidence guidelines and after consultation with key stakeholders a clinical pathway was developed. Data was collected on 30 patients both pre and post implementation of the pathway. Education sessions were held before and during the project to ED medical and nursing staff.

Just prior to the implementing the pathway a significant adverse event occurred. A patient suffered a cerebellar cerebrovascular accident following cardioversion. This event resulted in all patients requiring an echocardiogram prior to cardioversion.

The data showed that the number of patients treated with AF according to our pathway increased from 0% to 59%. The number of patients where chronicity was recorded remained essentially unchanged from 70% to 68%. The number of patients with a documented CHADS 2 score recorded improved from 7% to 35%

The project resulted in the establishment of a safe and effective pathway to standardise the treatment of patient's presenting in rapid AF. Sustaining and continuing to improve the pathway is an on-going challenge.