

Unexplained Severe Pain?

THINK AORTA

Aortic Dissection is an emergency that is often fatal when missed

CT Scan for a definitive diagnosis

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PATIENTS ASK EMERGENCY DOCTORS TO COLLABORATE IN TACKLING UNNECESSARY DEATHS

Doctors at the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine annual conference in Dublin next week will be invited to collaborate with a patient-led campaign to reduce the number of patients dying in Irish Emergency Departments from Aortic Dissection - a life-threatening medical condition. An Aortic Dissection is a tear in the body's largest artery that carries blood from the heart. Unless a patient receives rapid diagnosis and transfer to a specialist centre for immediate surgery, Aortic Dissection often proves fatal. Now, patient association Aortic Dissection Awareness (UK & Ireland) is challenging the number of unnecessary deaths that occur due to misdiagnosis of Aortic Dissection in Irish hospitals. Patient representatives are asking IAEM to collaborate and introduce changes in education, awareness and policy in order to drive improvements. The Chair, Vice-Chair and Medical Advisor of the national patient association are all attending the IAEM annual conference at the Castleknock Hotel next week, to speak with Emergency doctors and urge them to focus on addressing this problem.

The patient-led Think Aorta campaign was inspired by the tragic death of Mr. Tim Fleming from an Aortic Dissection in 2015, after he was sent home from Dublin Tallaght Hospital's Emergency Department with an incorrect diagnosis of gastritis. Mr. Fleming's daughter, Catherine Fowler, Vice-Chair of patient association Aortic Dissection Awareness (UK & Ireland) is a guest speaker at the Irish Association of Emergency Medicine conference.

Catherine explains: *"We had no idea, when Dad died, of how common it is for Aortic Dissection to be missed in the Emergency Department. Over the last three years, the picture has become very clear. Sadly, I know of many other families in Ireland who have lost their relatives to missed Aortic Dissection in Dublin hospitals during that time. We must do something to change the future for others. As a result of the Think Aorta campaign, the Royal College of Emergency Medicine in the UK has accepted that missed aortic dissection is a real issue and they are working with us to address this. I will be asking the Irish Association of Emergency Medicine to do the same."*

Statistics show that a diagnosis of Aortic Dissection is only considered in half of the patients who present with the potentially-fatal condition. One-third of patients with an Aortic Dissection are actively treated in the Emergency Department for a different, incorrect diagnosis such as a heart attack or gastritis. The gold standard and only definitive diagnostic tool for Aortic Dissection is a CT scan, but Emergency doctors are often reluctant to order one until it is too late.

“Aortic Dissection is not a difficult condition to diagnose” says Catherine. “A doctor just has to be aware enough to Think Aorta in the first place, then once their suspicion is raised, they must request an immediate CT scan to confirm. Experience in the UK shows that if Emergency Departments educate staff about Aortic Dissection and lower the barriers to CT scanning, lives will be saved.”

Joining Catherine at the conference in Dublin next week are the Chair of Aortic Dissection Awareness (UK & Ireland), Mr. Gareth Owens, who is himself an Aortic Dissection survivor, and their Medical Advisor, Mr. Graham Cooper, a leading Cardiothoracic Surgeon and past-President of the Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery in Great Britain & Ireland.

Mr. Owens explains: *“All over Europe, Emergency Departments are changing their practices to improve the diagnosis and treatment of Aortic Dissection and save lives. We owe it to the patients and relatives we represent to ensure that Ireland has the opportunity to improve diagnosis of Aortic Dissection in pace with the UK and other EU countries. I am looking forward to discussing with Dr. Emily O’Conor, President of IAEM, how we can best collaborate to tackle this issue of misdiagnosis and introduce change in Irish Emergency Departments, in order to save the lives of Irish patients with Aortic Dissection.”*

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Aortic Dissection Awareness (UK & Ireland) is the Patient Association for people affected by Aortic Dissection and their families. We are the voice of Aortic Dissection patients in the UK & Ireland. Our work involves raising awareness of Aortic Dissection, its diagnosis and treatment; providing vital friendship, support and advice for patients and family members; encouraging research into the condition; and working with healthcare providers to ensure that best practice diagnosis and care for Aortic Dissection are implemented consistently across the UK & Ireland. We measure our success by the increasing number of Aortic Dissection survivors joining our free support network - currently around 250.

The Think Aorta campaign website is at: www.thinkaorta.org

