

World Heart Rhythm Day; Wednesday 13th of June 2007

World Heart Rhythm Day June 13th Heart rhythm disturbances can be fatal! Today is World Heart Rhythm Day!!

Raising awareness of life-threatening heart rhythm conditions is the key message we need to get across on Heart Rhythm day. World Heart Rhythm day will be commemorated across the globe. In Australia and New Zealand that means education say the two leaders of a newly formed group trying to fight and prevent young sudden death from heart rhythm problems. The group is called TRAGADY (Trans-Tasman Response AGAinst sudden Death in the Young) and the leaders are Associate Professors Jon Skinner, Childrens heart rhythm specialist from Auckland, and Chris Semsarian, specialist cardiologist from the Agnes Ginges institute in Sydney.

“Conditions such as long QT syndrome and hypertrophic cardiomyopathy can strike down apparently fit and healthy young people” says Dr Skinner. “It’s so important to recognise these conditions early, because effective treatments are available.”

Some life-threatening heart rhythm conditions cause sudden collapse in an otherwise fit and healthy young person with little or no warning. Collapse can occur during or after exercise, while driving or even when asleep. A seizure may follow due to shortage of blood getting to the brain.

Chris Semsarian specialises in heart conditions such as these which run in families, and runs an active clinical and research programme. “People who have a family history of sudden death in young people (meaning usually less the 40 years old) should be especially wary of sudden collapses in themselves. They should be referred to a cardiologist and have a thorough investigation, including an electrocardiogram”

TRAGADY is a multidisciplinary group of researchers, clinicians and lay representatives, from the lay group SADS (Sudden Arrhythmic Death Syndromes group) most of whom have had personal or family involvement with these conditions. “TRAGADY is unusual in a number of ways” says Dr Skinner, “Firstly, the agenda is wide open, all that matters is whatever we do, we do it to try to reduce young sudden death. This includes research, best clinical practice documents, education, and campaigning for resources; we are not confined to one specialty area. Secondly, it has representatives from all of the States in Australia and New Zealand. Thirdly, it is independent of the usual professional bodies dealing with health issues, allowing greater freedom in how it can act. Finally, from the clinicians perspective, having family members present keeps the group grounded and focused.”

In its first year TRAGADY members have developed practice guidelines for pathologists dealing with a sudden unexpected death of a young person. “Failure to investigate such deaths properly is a failed opportunity to prevent death in other family members” says Dr Semsarian.

On World Heart Rhythm Day, Drs Skinner and Semsarian say we should celebrate the collective expertise we have in Australasia. There are many lives that have already been saved, yet we must continue to educate and campaign for adequate resources to help the thousands of others with heart rhythm problems.

Information about these conditions can be found on www.cidg.org and if you would like to join TRAGADY as a member- go to www.sads.com.au.

Associate Professor Jon Skinner works at the Starship Childrens Hospital in Auckland, New Zealand, and Associate Professor Chris Semsarian works at the Agnes Ginges Institute in Sydney.

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