

Heart disorder hits national epidemic proportions

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A growing epidemic of the world's most common heart rhythm disorder is resulting in an alarming number of hospital admissions in Australia, according to cardiology researchers.

A research team led by Professor Prash Sanders, from the University of Adelaide and the [Cardiovascular Research](#) Centre at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, found that hospital admissions due to atrial fibrillation had more than tripled in Australia over a 15-year period.

These findings are being presented at the European Society of Cardiology's Scientific Congress in Stockholm, Sweden, today. The Congress is the largest annual meeting of doctors and scientists in Europe dedicated to the study of cardiovascular disease.

Professor Sanders, the Knapman Chair of Cardiology Research at the University of Adelaide, says the results are a wakeup call for doctors and healthcare authorities.

"There are very few studies that have looked at hospitalisation rates across an entire country due to atrial fibrillation, and none in recent years.

"This study highlights the enormous public health burden of atrial fibrillation on hospitals and the need for not only better treatments for this increasingly common condition, but also preventative strategies to stop it occurring in the first place," Professor Sanders says.

Chief investigator Mr Chris Wong, a final-year medical student at the University of Adelaide, says atrial fibrillation is the most common, sustained [heart rhythm disorder](#) in humans, affecting almost one in 10 people over the age of 80.

"Importantly, left untreated, it can have devastating consequences such as stroke and death. One in five strokes are due to this heart rhythm disorder," Mr Wong says.

The researchers looked at all hospitalisations due to atrial fibrillation in Australia (population 22 million) over a 15-year period from 1993 to 2008.

The 200% increase in hospitalisations was despite a decrease in the length of stay for each admission.

"This highlights the fact that not only have the absolute number of admissions increased significantly, but also the percentage of the population hospitalised for [atrial fibrillation](#) is continuing to increase at an alarming rate," Mr Wong says.

The researchers also discovered that Indigenous Australians had greater rates of hospitalisation for this condition, and at younger ages.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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