Study dismisses theory that higher stroke rate in women is due to underuse of warfarin

New strategies are needed to reduce stroke risk in older women, suggests a study which found that women have a higher risk of stroke than men, regardless of their risk profile and use of warfarin.

People with atrial fibrillation (AF) have a fivefold increase in the risk of stroke compared with the general population. In the new study, researchers investigated the theory that under-utilisation of oral anticoagulation treatment among women is a factor in their increased stroke risk.

Participants in the retrospective, population-based cohort study were patients aged 65 years or older admitted to hospital with recently diagnosed AF in the province of Quebec in Canada between 1998 and 2007. The cohort comprised 39,398 men (47.2 per cent) and 44,115 women (52.8 per cent). The researchers analysed information about the patients, including hospital discharge data and prescription drug claims databases.

Thirty days after discharge, 58.2 per cent of men and 60.6 per cent of women had filled a warfarin prescription, and even in adjusted analyses women appeared to fill more prescriptions than men.

Adherence to warfarin treatment was good in both sexes.

Stroke incidence was 2.02 per 100 person-years in women and 1.61 per 100 person-years in men. The sex difference was mainly driven by patients aged 75 years or older. Women had a higher risk of stroke than men, even after adjusting for baseline comorbid conditions.

‘New strategies are needed to further reduce stroke risk in women with AF,’ conclude the authors.

Tsadok M et al (2012)