



40 Years of the British Heart Foundation

For many general practitioners and practice nurses, awareness of the British Heart Foundation stems from these monthly Factfiles. However, the aim of the British Heart Foundation is much broader and is 'to play a leading role in the fight against heart disease, so this is no longer a major cause of disability and premature death'. The aim is achieved by the funding of medical research into the causes, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of heart disease and this activity accounts for almost 80% of our external expenditure. Support is available in three forms: project grants of up to three years duration, programme grants (many of which are renewable) of up to five years duration and research training fellowships of various sorts. Those which are most likely to be relevant for general practitioners are clinical PhD studentships and junior or intermediate research fellowships. Details of these are available on our website at www.bhf.org.uk.

Supporting Patients

Another important aspect of our work is the provision of support and information to patients and their families through British Heart Foundation nurses, rehabilitation programmes and over 250 cardiac support groups. Currently the British Heart Foundation funds 45 nurses based in hospital but whose responsibilities are mainly in the community. They provide help to patients and their families following discharge from hospital after either a heart attack or cardiac surgery. We know that they provide an important bridge between hospital and the community and ensure that arrangements for follow up including secondary prevention and rehabilitation are optimised. Details of cardiac rehabilitation schemes in the UK were recently covered in a factfile (9/2000) and further information is available on our website or by contacting the Cardiac Care Department on 0207 487 7125.

Materials for patients and their families

In recent years much effort has gone into improving the education of the public of heart disease prevention and treatment. The British Heart Foundation provides (free of charge) a range of materials for cardiac patients and their families. Amongst these are the Heart Information Series of 18 pamphlets which are available from the BHF distribution department telephone 020 7935 0185.

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| No.1 Physical Activity and your Heart | No.10 Coronary Angioplasty and Bypass Surgery |
| No.2 Smoking and your Heart | No.11 Valvular Heart Disease |
| No.3 Reducing your Blood Cholesterol | No.12 Having Heart Surgery |
| No.4 Blood Pressure | No.13 Heart Transplantation |
| No.5 Eating for your Heart | No.14 Palpitation |
| No.6 Angina | No.15 Pacemakers |
| No.7 Heart Attack and Rehabilitation | No.16 Peripheral Arterial Disease |
| No.8 Living with Heart Failure | No.17 Medicines for the Heart |
| No.9 Cardiac Investigations | No.18 The Heart – Technical Terms Explained |

The series has been received with acclaim but further modifications are being made and we hope that in the future we will have audiotape versions for those individuals who are partially sighted.

Other sources of information

Besides the written sources of information we have a range of video productions, several of which are available at a modest charge. In addition, we have a heart information helpline, which handles around 1,400 enquiries per month mostly by means of telephone. This information service is staffed by nurses with a collective experience of cardiac care. Expansion of the service, which complements your own activities, has been agreed, following discussions with the Royal College of General Practitioners. A very recent development has been the open advertising of the service to people and general practitioners in the south west region. Lessons we learn from that will be incorporated into plans for further expansion.

The 40th Anniversary

2001 will see many events both nationally and locally and your participation in them will be most welcome. One, which is likely to come to your attention, is the British Heart Foundation 'Family Heart Study'. This is a ground breaking research project that aims to pin point the rogue genes, which contribute to coronary heart disease. This is being co-ordinated from the universities of Leeds and Leicester who are seeking to involve 2,000 families with members who have experienced heart disease at a young age (under 65). Specifically, there is a need to identify pairs of brothers and sisters where both have suffered any of the following before the age of 65.

- Heart attack
- Hospital admission with angina
- Coronary balloon angioplasty
- Coronary bypass surgery

People can get involved in the Family Heart Study project by calling Freephone 0800 052 7154.

In conclusion, much has been achieved and the past 16 years have seen a halving of the annual death rate from coronary heart disease in people under the age of 65. Nevertheless diseases of the heart and circulation remain the most common cause of premature death. Consequently, the role of the British Heart Foundation will continue to be an important one into the future.

Acknowledgement:

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