

National Alliance of Integrated Afib Centers: The Next Level of Afib Treatment

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Atrial fibrillation treatment has taken a big step forward with the founding of the National Alliance of Integrated Afib Centers (NAIAC). Members of NAIAC will extensively collaborate to offer afib patients a multidisciplinary approach to care. In addition, the resources, research, and technologies of member organizations can lead to more patient-centered care for afib patients.

“NAIAC is changing how we treat afib,” said Jonathan Philpott, MD, the first president of NAIAC and a cardiothoracic surgeon at Sentara Heart Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia. “With combined resources and shared expertise, we are establishing the next level of afib treatment. Together, we are now able to offer patients all of their treatment options, and by working together, improve the quality of life for our patients with afib.”

This coalition of hospitals and physicians, along with StopAfib.org, the world’s leading afib patient organization, advocates for an integrated approach to treating afib. NAIAC will promote cooperation among specialists to provide a comprehensive, yet personal, approach to treating afib.



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Alliance members also partner together across geographic boundaries to share data, research and resources, all in an effort to improve education and to advance the treatment of afib. For example, Alliance members offer patients a vast array of options including the cutting-edge hybrid procedure for difficult afib cases.

As the founder of StopAfib.org, it’s exciting to be part of the formation of this new organization that will benefit patients and their families. We’re proud to be providing the patient perspective for NAIAC. StopAfib.org and NAIAC have a natural partnership because we both aim for afib patients to have collaborative and comprehensive care. For example, when afib patients come to a NAIAC facility, they will be under the care of both an electrophysiologist and a heart surgeon. Working together, the electrophysiologist, surgeon, and patient will design a care plan tailored to each patient’s individual needs.

The need for such care is pressing. Well over five million people in the United States currently have afib, and that number could exceed 15 million by 2050.

HEART OF A NEW ORGANIZATION

Following a stressful heart transplant procedure, Dr. Philpott experienced afib for the very first time. He realized just how vulnerable afib patients can feel when confronted with the challenge of finding surgeons and EPs that they can trust. Unlike other heart care, few afib practitioners thoroughly track their results, so he was confused over just what to believe. Therefore, Dr. Philpott discussed with colleagues who also treat afib the notion of a collaborative effort among healthcare facilities to track data and establish practice standards and protocols for afib treatment.

“Patients want to know all of their treatment options and the success rates of all of those options for their particular type of afib,” Dr. Philpott says. “The only way to make this happen was to form a



Figure 1: The National Alliance of Integrated Afib Centers was founded Sept. 7, 2013, with the mission of sharing information among afib treatment facilities, and providing patients with more treatment options and in-depth education about the condition.

group of like-minded centers that firmly believed in this team approach to afib into an Alliance where we could then communicate the vision to the nation.”

The effort became more formal when representatives from five facilities plus StopAfib.org met on September 7, 2013, to discuss the needs of afib patients. From that meeting, the National Alliance of Integrated Afib Centers was born. In addition to StopAfib.org, NAIAC includes these five healthcare facilities and organizations:

- Sentara Heart Arrhythmia Center, Norfolk, Virginia
- Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute, Los Angeles, California
- St. Helena Arrhythmia Center, Napa Valley, California

- St. Vincent’s Medical Center, Bridgeport, Connecticut
- Orlando Health Heart Institute, Orlando, Florida

MULTIPLE BENEFITS FOR PATIENTS

NAIAC truly takes afib patient care to the next level. Through the Alliance, patients will be able to access more resources and specialists, and benefit from more collaboration among specialists. This kind of comprehensive treatment also means it will be easier for patients to receive personalized care.

This personalized care is important because each person’s afib is unique. Since afib treatment is best tailored to the individual patient, NAIAC members will

have resources to address these needs. The wide variety of treatments can confuse patients and healthcare providers alike.

One of the greatest strengths of NAIAC is the notion of collaborative care. At a NAIAC facility, afib patients are under the care of both an electrophysiologist and cardiac surgeon. This joint approach ensures that patients receive more information and more treatment options.

This collaborative approach means patients will be given options for treatment, with pros and cons explained in an easy-to-understand manner. Such a multidisciplinary approach also ensures patients will be able to choose the treatment that best suits their lifestyle and is most likely to provide them with a successful treatment. NAIAC is also committed to involving the patient in the treatment process.

In addition, NAIAC represents a leap forward with afib procedures as well. Patients at NAIAC facilities benefit from the shared experience, research, and technology resulting in improved procedures and treatment. Because of this shared information, patients will have access to the most current, high-tech treatment options. Also, participating healthcare providers will stay up to date on emerging afib treatments by attending NAIAC conferences and the ongoing development of best practices for afib treatment.

“These centers can present patients with all of the treatment options and be up front about each option’s pros and cons, success rates, and complications,” Dr. Philpott says. “This level of informed decision making is what patients want and should have. It will define the next generation of afib care in the United States.”

FUTURE AND EXPANSION

With its six founding organizations, NAIAC is off to a strong start. Throughout 2014, NAIAC members will share research and treatment protocols. All types of heart specialists will collaborate, from electrophysiologists to



Figure 2: As part of the Alliance’s mission, specialists from leading afib treatment facilities, such as Dr. Jonathan Philpott, surgeon, and Dr. Robert Bernstein, electrophysiologist, of Sentara Heart Arrhythmia Center in Norfolk, Virginia, will consult with afib patients to offer a multidisciplinary approach to afib care. Patients at Alliance facilities work with an electrophysiologist and surgeon to design a care plan tailored to the patients’ individual needs.



Figure 3: NAIAC centers offer afib patients cutting-edge techniques such as the hybrid procedure where the surgeon performs a minimally invasive surgical ablation and the electrophysiologist performs a catheter ablation.

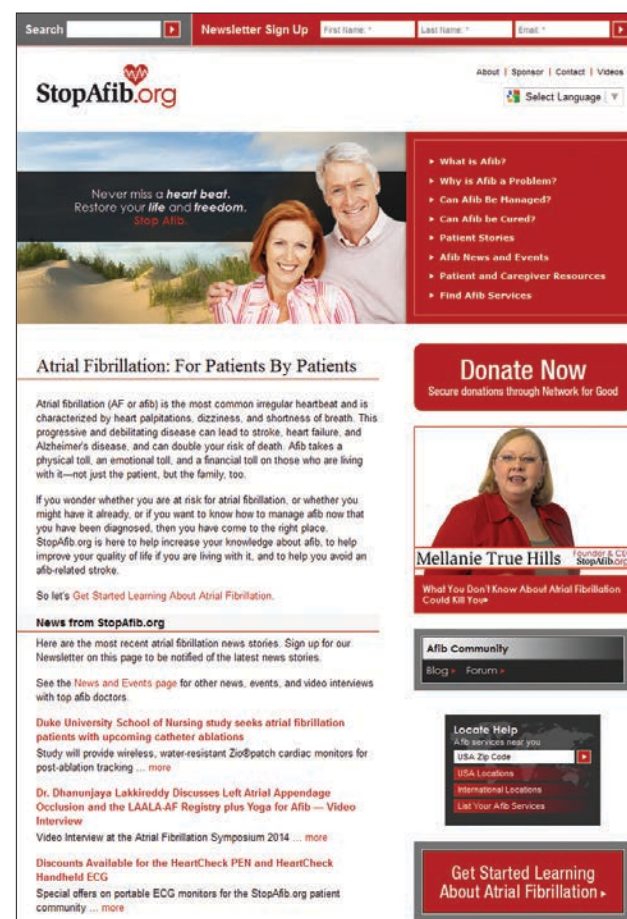


Figure 4: StopAfib.org, the world’s leading atrial fibrillation website and afib patient resource, provides the Alliance with the patients’ perspective. Through ongoing input from StopAfib.org, NAIAC centers can provide patients with the answers that they are seeking.

cardiologists to cardiac surgeons. Patients with complex, hard-to-treat afib will be able to get help to manage their unique condition and improve their quality of life.

NAIAC will expand to additional healthcare facilities in 2015.

“We hope these centers will be

resources for the highest level of patient care and patient education, where patients can learn about treatment options in a realistic and straightforward way,” Dr. Philpott says. “In the short term, we hope that each center will see a higher number of patients. In the long term, we hope that the level of afib care will be

dramatically improved throughout the country as the results and education of the local medical community improves under the direction of each center.” ■

For more information and to become involved in NAIAC, see www.naiac.org and www.stopafib.org.