

Introduction of a National Screening Programme for Abdominal Aortic Aneurysms

SUMMARY

The National Screening Centre in collaboration with the Vascular Lab, MDH is launching a national screening programme for Abdominal Aortic Aneurysms (AAAs) which will invite all male residents of 65 years of age to participate. Radiographers trained in vascular imaging will perform clinics in the new Hamrun Community Clinic up to 3 times per week and refer anyone with an AAA to the Vascular Lab at MDH where the AAA will be monitored and referred to the Vascular surgeons when necessary.

Residents will receive an invitation letter by post in the month following their 65th birthday and will be asked to contact the Screening Centre to set an appointment by return mail, telephone or by email.

This screening programme is only for asymptomatic individuals. If you need to refer a patient with signs and/or symptoms of Vascular pathology, please use the existing referral pathways.

Please find enclosed a soft copy of the information leaflet in Maltese and English languages which will be sent with every invitation.

BACKGROUND

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysms (AAAs) are defined as Abdominal Aortas whose diameter exceeds 3cm. This is usually asymptomatic and if it progresses can lead to sudden rupture and death. Between 2010 and 2019 77 persons were reported to have died from an AAA in Malta, however this is probably an underestimation given the low post-mortem rates for deaths in the local community.

Several international and European organisations recommend the introduction of a screening programme for AAAs¹. So far, organised screening programmes are available in the UK, US, Germany, and Sweden.

SCREENING PROCEDURE

Screening is performed by trained radiographers who use an ultrasound probe to visualise the Abdominal Aorta to measure its diameter. This procedure takes approx. 20 minutes and only needs to be done once if the diameter is <3cm. Such individuals will not require further screening. If the diameter is larger, the clients will enter a surveillance programme at MDH Vascular Dept. where the AAA will be monitored at the recommended intervals. AAAs which are larger than 5.5cm or who have a high rate of growth are referred to vascular surgeons for elective repair.

¹ European Society for Cardiology, Society of Vascular Surgery, European Society for Vascular Surgery, Canadian Taskforce on Preventive Health Care, Canadian Society for Vascular Surgery, US Prevention Services Task Force, American College of Preventive Medicine, American College of Cardiology, American Heart Association