

AN OPPORTUNITY TO PREVENT STROKES?

Atrial fibrillation identification by emergency medical services

BACKGROUND

- Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a common arrhythmia and a significant risk factor for stroke.
- Oral anticoagulants (OACs) substantially reduce the risk
- Many people have undiagnosed and therefore untreated AF

METHODS

A qualitative study using one-to-one interviews with healthcare and service providers, and focus groups involving members of the public.

A semi-structured topic guide explored identification of undiagnosed AF during emergency contacts with non-conveyed patients, including:

- Six interviews with paramedics
- Five interviews with 'field experts' from cardiology, general practice, public health, academic research, healthcare policy, and primary care commissioning.
- Four focus groups involving eighteen members of the public.

Is opportunistic screening for incidental AF by ambulance clinicians acceptable and feasible?

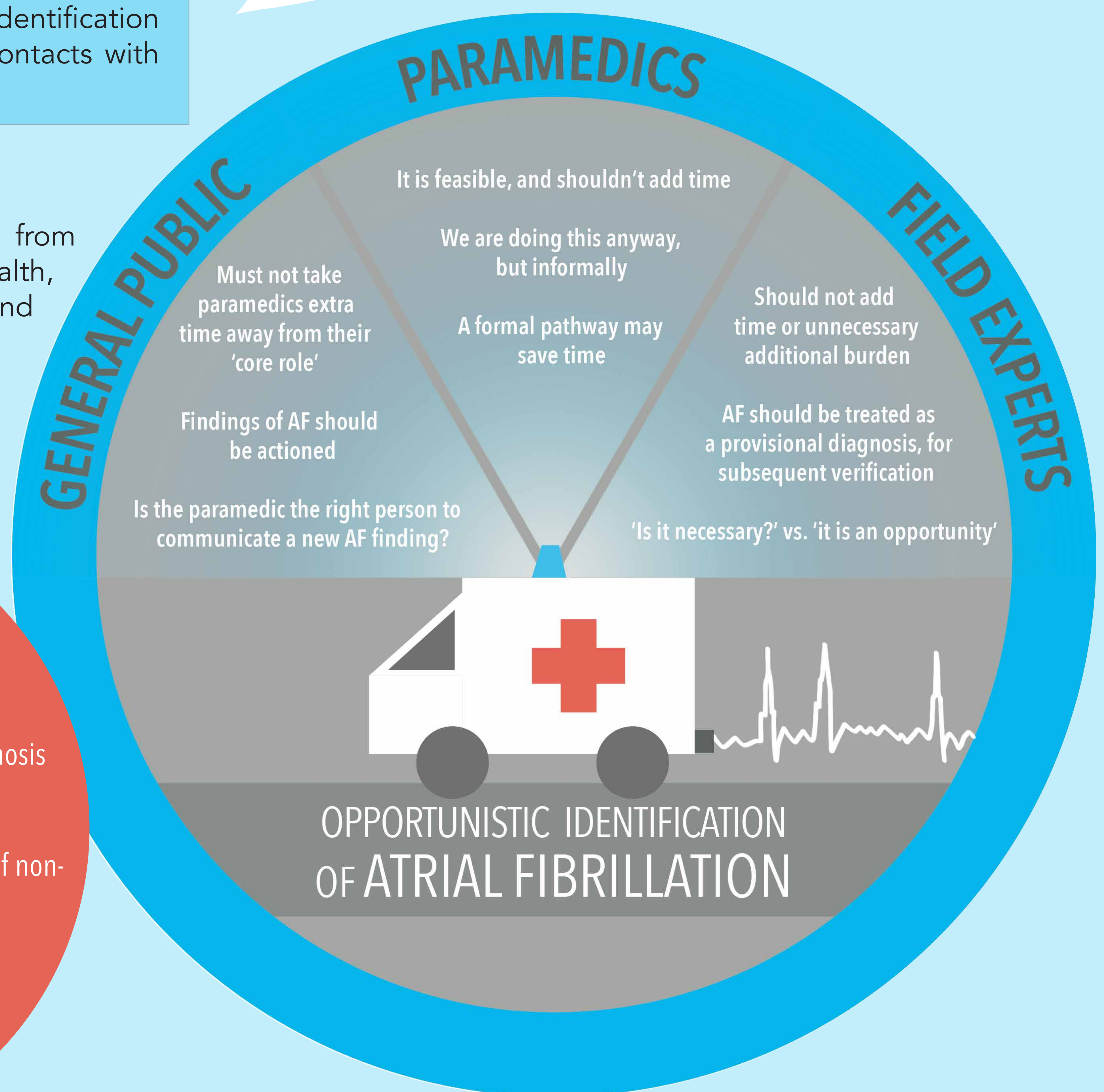
FINDINGS

All participant groups were in favour of a formal pathway to 'action' new findings of AF

Public participants worried about how the diagnosis would be communicated with them

Paramedics concerns focussed on safety-netting of non-conveyed patients and ensuring follow-up

Field experts recommended more work to understand current processes to guide a pathway



CONCLUSION

Opportunistic identification of AF by ambulance clinicians was supported by participants but concerns were expressed around communicating the identification of AF to patients, the need for evidence on the effectiveness of current referral pathways, and how this public health screening fitted with the emergency response role of the ambulance service.