

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, August 29, 2006**

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## **African-Americans Have Same Risk as Pack-A-Day Smokers for Developing Peripheral Arterial Disease, a Marker for Heart Attack and Stroke**

***Interventional Radiologists Offer Free Screenings in September, Vascular Disease Awareness Month***

Fairfax, Virginia (August 29, 2006) – September first is the kickoff day for the **Legs For Life® free national screening program** for the early detection of peripheral arterial disease (PAD) to prevent amputation, heart attack and stroke. **Although 10 million Americans have PAD, African-Americans are twice as likely to develop it.** Their increased risk makes them as vulnerable as someone who has smoked a pack of cigarettes a day for 20 years. PAD is “hardening of the arteries” in the legs most often due to atherosclerosis that occurs when “plaque” builds up inside the arteries causing them to clog and narrow.

**More than 50 percent of PAD patients are asymptomatic** and cannot feel the classic warning sign of PAD – intermittent claudication, or leg pain that occurs when walking or exercising and disappears when the person stops the activity. “Screening is essential because most people do not present classic symptoms—and by the time they do notice they have a problem, they are often facing amputation, kidney damage, or stroke,” says Harvey Wiener, DO, Legs For Life® Chair.

### **Why PAD is a Red Flag for Heart Attack and Stroke**

Often, the plaque blocks the smaller leg arteries first which is why peripheral arterial disease is considered a red flag for several life-threatening vascular diseases, such as heart attack and stroke. Because atherosclerosis is a systemic disease, **people with PAD are likely to develop blocked arteries throughout the body, putting them at risk for heart attack and stroke.** As diagnostic and vascular experts, interventional radiologists can intervene early, prevent vascular disease progression and provide non-surgical treatment if needed. Interventional radiologists use special X-rays, MRI or other imaging to guide a catheter and deliver treatments inside the body, usually through an artery. Interventional Radiology procedures offer less risk, less pain and less recovery time than surgery.

### **Free Local Screenings**

During the Legs For Life screening, an ankle brachial index (ABI) test is used to detect PAD. This quick, painless test compares the blood pressure in the legs to the blood pressure in the arms to determine how well the blood is flowing and whether further tests are needed. **“African-Americans and other high-risk groups need to get in the habit of getting an annual ABI test that can diagnose PAD. People need to know their ABI number the way they know their cholesterol, blood pressure or blood sugar number—it can save their life.”** Additionally during Legs For Life, interventional radiologists screen for related vascular diseases, including abdominal aortic aneurysm and carotid artery disease that can lead to stroke. Patients can find a local screening site at [www.LegsForLife.org](http://www.LegsForLife.org), as well an online assessment test and fact sheets.

### **Get Tested If You:**

- Have diabetes
- Smoke now or have ever smoked
- Are over age 50
- Are African-American
- Have a family history of vascular disease, such as PAD, aneurysm, heart attack or stroke

- Have high cholesterol, a high lipid blood test or high blood pressure
- Are overweight or inactive
- Have cramping in your leg when walking or exercising, that is relieved by resting

### **Treatment for Peripheral Arterial Disease**

Often, PAD can be treated with lifestyle changes. Smoking cessation, a structured exercise program, and medication are often all that is needed to alleviate symptoms and prevent further progression of the disease. “With early detection, patients could be sent to an interventional radiologist sooner so we could intervene to slow progression of the disease, and offer much less invasive treatment options, saving patients from amputation,” says Wiener. If further intervention is needed, interventional radiologists can perform non-surgical angioplasty to open the blocked artery in the leg and restore blood flow. Although most people associate angioplasty with coronary disease, angioplasty and the catheter-delivered stent were invented by interventional radiologists 31 years ago to treat PAD.

### **Society of Interventional Radiology Foundation**

The SIR Foundation is a scientific foundation dedicated to fostering research and education in interventional radiology for the purposes of advancing scientific knowledge, increasing the number of skilled investigators in interventional radiology, and developing innovative therapies that lead to improved patient care and quality of life.

The Society of Interventional Radiology is a founding partner of the PAD Coalition which, along with the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), is launching a national multi-year PAD awareness campaign September 19, 2006, called “Stay in Circulation.” More information on this campaign can be found at [www.aboutPAD.org](http://www.aboutPAD.org).

### **Legs For Life**

Legs For Life<sup>®</sup> is the largest, longest running and most inclusive national vascular disease screening program in the United States. The program has been held annually since 1998 in September, which is Vascular Disease Awareness Month. To date, nearly 322,000 people have been screened for PAD, with one in four found to be at risk for the disease. Legs For Life is a program of the SIR Foundation.

*Local interviews, medical illustrations and broadcast quality video footage are available.  
More information and local screening sites can be found at  
[www.LegsForLife.org](http://www.LegsForLife.org) or [www.SIRweb.org](http://www.SIRweb.org).*