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Advancing interventional radiology through research and education.

Legs For Life® National Screening for Vascular Disease

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Free National Screening in September Fights Cause of 50 Percent of all Diabetic Amputations

Interventional Radiologists Screen for Peripheral Arterial Disease – also a Red Flag for Future Heart Attack and Stroke

Fairfax, Virginia (August 29, 2005) – September first is the kick off of the Legs For Life® free national screening program for early detection of peripheral arterial disease (PAD) to prevent amputation, heart attack and stroke. Although 10 million Americans have PAD, diabetics are at highest risk with one in three over age 50 affected. 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.

People with diabetes are especially susceptible to PAD because diabetes affects every vascular bed in the body and it increases the risk for accelerated atherogenesis—the formation of plaque build-up in the lining of the arteries—which puts 18.2 million Americans with diabetes at risk.

Because atherosclerosis is a systemic disease, people with PAD are likely to have blocked arteries in other areas of their body. Over time, the plaque builds up in the arteries and blocks the smaller arteries first, such as in the legs. This causes decreased blood flow to the legs, which can result in pain when walking, and eventually gangrene and amputation.

Eventually the larger arteries, such as those in the heart or the carotid artery to the brain, become blocked as well. Thus, PAD in the legs is an early warning for future life-threatening vascular disease. "If undetected, peripheral arterial disease can lead to amputation and increase a person's risk of having a heart attack and stroke. The progression of PAD results in death for about one-third of patients," explained interventional radiologist and Legs For Life Chair Harvey Wiener, DO.

Due to the vascular damage caused by the progression of diabetes, more than 50 percent of diabetic 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 one-third of diabetics have peripheral arterial disease, but most 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 Wiener. "Diabetics and their physicians need to get in the habit of an annual ABI test to look for PAD. We want diabetics to know their ABI number the way they know their blood sugar number—both can save their life."

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. 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.

Get Tested If You:

- Have diabetes
- Have ever smoked or smoke now
- Are over age 50
- Have a family history of vascular disease, such as PAD, aneurysm, heart attack or stroke
- Have high cholesterol or a high lipid blood test
- Are overweight
- Have an inactive lifestyle
- Have a personal history of high blood pressure, heart disease, or other vascular disease
- Have cramping or tiredness in the muscle when walking or exercising, which is relieved by resting
- Have pain in the legs or feet that awakens you at night

About 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 nonsurgical 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.

About the 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.

Interventional radiologists are vascular experts who specialize in minimally invasive, targeted treatments performed using imaging to guide them. These physicians are board-certified in both Vascular & Interventional Radiology and Diagnostic Radiology.

About Legs For Life

Legs For Life 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. Nearly 322,000 people have been screened to date for PAD, with one in four found to be at risk for the disease. Legs For Life is a program of the SIR Foundation. Collaborating organizations include the American Diabetes Association, the American Radiological Nurses Association, the American Heart Association's Council on Cardiovascular Radiology and Intervention, and the Society for Vascular Nursing.

Local interviews, medical illustrations and broadcast quality video footage are available. More information can be found at www.LegsForLife.org or www.SIRweb.org.