

*Sept. 28, 2010*

## **Get a Leg Up on Heart Health Says Society of Interventional Radiology**

### ***Legs For Life® Program Provides Screening for Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD) to Protect One's Health, Life***

FAIRFAX, Va.—An estimated 10 million people suffer from peripheral arterial disease or PAD—a common yet serious disease that is a marker for heart attack and stroke—and many with the disease may be unaware that they have it, says the Society of Interventional Radiology.

“Heart attack and stroke are two major health concerns for Americans today. One indicator for them is leg pain caused by peripheral arterial disease or PAD, a disease that many people may not know about,” noted Sanjay Misra, M.D., an interventional radiologist at the Mayo Clinic and Foundation for Medical Education and Research in Rochester, Minn. “Clogged arteries in the legs—just like clogged arteries in the heart—mean that you are at future risk for heart attack or stroke,” added Misra, who is chair of SIR’s PAD Service Line.

“Understanding, preventing, detecting and managing PAD are important to community health. Left unrecognized and untreated, PAD can limit mobility and activity; at worst, it results in serious disability and loss of limb and life,” said Misra. “The Society of Interventional Radiology’s Legs For Life® national screening program wants to make individuals aware of the existence of undetected health problems, help identify whether they have PAD and encourage them to seek follow-up with their primary care doctor and an interventional radiologist,” said Misra. “The public—as well as the medical community—need to understand the importance of the diagnosis of PAD in terms of symptoms and avoiding amputation and, more importantly, in how a diagnosis of PAD brings added risk of heart attack, stroke and death,” he explained.

PAD is a vascular disease that develops mostly as a result of atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries, which occurs when cholesterol and scar tissue build up, forming plaque that narrows and clogs the arteries and slows blood flow to the legs. Symptoms—such as leg pain while walking, numbness and tingling in the lower legs and feet, coldness in the lower legs and feet, or ulcers or sores on the legs or feet that don’t heal—could be PAD warning signs.

In many cases, PAD can be treated with medication (such as blood thinners or drugs that dilate an affected artery), lifestyle changes (such as smoking cessation), diet and a structured exercise program. With early detection, patients could see an interventional radiologist when intervention is most effective and less invasive treatments are still an option. If needed, interventional radiologists can perform minimally invasive angioplasty and/or stenting to open a blocked artery in the leg and restore blood flow.

High-risk groups, such as older Americans, smokers and diabetics, may take SIR’s Legs For Life® free, online self-assessment quiz at [www.LegsForLife.org](http://www.LegsForLife.org). The online quiz helps assess health, family and lifestyle risks for PAD. The higher one’s score, the more important it is for that individual to discuss the quiz’s results with his or her doctor.

During September, National Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD) Awareness Month, individuals may also find limited free Legs For Life® screening sites listed at [www.LegsForLife.org](http://www.LegsForLife.org). During screening, an individual is given the ankle brachial index (ABI), a simple and painless test that compares the blood pressure in the legs to the pressure in the arms to determine how well blood is flowing.

Many interventional radiologists offer year-round screenings by appointment and can be found with SIR’s Doctor Finder at <http://doctor-finder.SIRweb.org/> (choose “Peripheral Arterial Disease” in the Area of Expertise list). For more information, visit SIR’s Web site at [www.SIRweb.org](http://www.SIRweb.org).

### **About the Society of Interventional Radiology**

Interventional radiologists are physicians who specialize in minimally invasive, targeted treatments. They offer the most in-depth knowledge of the least invasive treatments available coupled with diagnostic and clinical experience across all specialties. They use X-ray, MRI and other imaging to advance a catheter in the body, such as in an artery, to treat at the source of the disease internally. As the inventors of angioplasty and the catheter-delivered stent, which were first used in the legs to treat peripheral arterial disease, interventional radiologists pioneered minimally invasive modern medicine. Today, interventional oncology is a growing specialty area of interventional radiology. Interventional radiologists can deliver treatments for cancer directly to the tumor without significant side effects or damage to nearby normal tissue.

Many conditions that once required surgery can be treated less invasively by interventional radiologists. Interventional radiology treatments offer less risk, less pain and less recovery time compared to open surgery. Visit [www.SIRweb.org](http://www.SIRweb.org).

### **About Legs for Life<sup>®</sup>**

Legs For Life<sup>®</sup> was founded by the Society of Interventional Radiology in 1997, piloted in 1998 and launched nationally in 1999. Held annually, Legs For Life<sup>®</sup> is the longest running and most inclusive national vascular disease screening program in the United States. Select sites will also screen for abdominal aortic aneurysm, stroke risk and venous disease.

The Society of Interventional Radiology (SIR) is a founding partner of the PAD Coalition which, along with the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI), runs the national PAD awareness campaign in September called “Stay in Circulation: Take Steps to Learn About PAD.” Visit [www.LegsForLife.org](http://www.LegsForLife.org).

*Local interviews are available by contacting SIR's communications department via e-mail at [mverrillo@SIRweb.org](mailto:mverrillo@SIRweb.org) or by phone at (703) 460-5572.*