

UC San Diego Physician Lauded as Recipient of Inaugural Best Research Award

Research Shows PAD Risk Higher Among Certain Ethnic Groups

September 27, 2007 |

Matthew Allison, M.D., M.P.H., assistant adjunct professor, University of California, San Diego, department of family and preventive medicine, received the first-ever “Best PAD Research Award” from The Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD) Coalition at the organization’s 4th annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

The Best PAD Research Award honors the work of investigators and acknowledges the creation of new clinical research relevant to understanding the causes, methods of diagnosis, and treatments for peripheral arterial disease.

Dr. Allison and his colleagues were recognized for their work on the research study, *The Effect of Novel Cardiovascular Risk Factors on the Ethnic-Specific Odds for Peripheral Arterial Disease in the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (MESA)*.

Dr. Allison’s analysis confirmed that African Americans have a 50% increased risk for developing PAD, suggesting that unknown factors may be responsible for ethnic differences. This study also confirmed a reduced risk of PAD in Asian and Hispanic individuals.

“This study raises new and significant questions on the importance of ethnic background and peripheral arterial disease,” said Allison. “It suggests that perhaps there’s a genetic component we haven’t accounted for yet. Our next step is to look in other places to see if we can determine why there are added risks among distinct ethnic groups.”

Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD)

Peripheral arterial disease occurs when arteries in the legs become narrowed or clogged with fatty deposits, reducing blood flow to the legs. This can result in leg muscle pain when walking, disability, amputation and a poor quality of life. Blocked leg arteries found in people with PAD can be a warning sign that other arteries, including those in the heart and brain, may also be affected, increasing the risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Traditional risk factors for PAD include advancing age, history of smoking, diabetes, high blood pressure, abnormal cholesterol, and personal history of heart disease or stroke. More recently, other studies have suggested that African American ethnicity is also associated with an increased risk of PAD.

It is unknown whether this increased risk in the African American community is inherited or due to increased exposure to the more common risk factors. To answer this question, the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (MESA), sponsored by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, involved more than 6,800 men and women from six communities in the United States. This study enrolled a substantial number of individuals from minority populations, including African Americans, Hispanics and Chinese Americans.

"On behalf of the PAD Coalition, we are delighted to present this prestigious award to Dr. Matthew Allison," said Alan T. Hirsch, M.D., Chair of the PAD. Coalition, Professor of Epidemiology and Community Health at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, and Director of the Vascular Medicine Program at the Minneapolis Heart Institute. "As is true for all heart diseases, new research that provides insight into causal factors of this preventable artery-damaging disease is critical, particularly as we try to elucidate why ethnic-based PAD health disparities exist. Knowledge that African Americans are, indeed, at increased risk will undoubtedly spur other investigation into the causes of this risk, as well as public health efforts to inform African Americans about this risk so that health may be maintained."

Background

The Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD) Coalition is an alliance of leading health organizations, vascular health professional societies, and government agencies united to raise public and health professional awareness about lower extremity PAD. The Coalition is working with the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute on a national campaign, "Stay in Circulation: Take Steps to Learn about PAD." Established in 2004, the PAD Coalition is coordinated by the Vascular Disease Foundation (www.vdf.org), a national, not-for-profit section 501(c)(3) organization.

The UCSD Department of Family and Preventive Medicine ranks first nationally among peer departments in federal research dollars granted. The Department is dedicated to conducting ground-breaking research, offering a broad-based curriculum to UCSD undergraduates, medical students, residents, and physicians across the country, as well as providing education and care to the underserved community.

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