

# THINK<sup>®</sup> AORTA

[www.thinkaorta.net](http://www.thinkaorta.net)

## MEDIA RELEASE

**DATE:** 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**CONTACT:** Gareth Owens  
T: 07471 733122  
E: [Gareth@kirbyhill.org](mailto:Gareth@kirbyhill.org)



## PATIENT LEADERS WELCOME PUBLICATION OF LIFE-SAVING NATIONAL GUIDANCE AFTER 5-YEAR 'THINK AORTA' CAMPAIGN

**Two survivors of a life-threatening cardiac condition have welcomed the publication of new national guidance to improve the diagnosis of Aortic Dissection, after a 5-year campaign which attracted the support of the Secretary of State for Health and the Presidents of two of the medical profession's Royal Colleges with a combined membership of 21,000 hospital doctors.**

Gareth Owens (56) and Haleema Saadia (26) survived an Aortic Dissection - a catastrophic tear in the main artery carrying blood from the heart to the brain, limbs and vital organs. Together, they now lead the national patient association **Aortic Dissection Awareness UK & Ireland** and its **THINK AORTA** campaign, launched in 2017 to improve diagnosis of this lethal condition.

Although considered a rare condition, Aortic Dissection kills more people in the UK each year than road traffic accidents. Half of patients arriving at A&E with the condition are initially misdiagnosed. A third are actively treated for a different, incorrect diagnosis, often with fatal results. Patients with an Aortic Dissection need an urgent CT scan to confirm the diagnosis.

For **Patient Safety Awareness Week**, which starts on 13<sup>th</sup> March, Gareth & Haleema want to raise awareness, highlight the success of the **THINK AORTA** campaign and welcome the recent publication by the **Royal College of Emergency Medicine** and the **Royal College of Radiologists** of the first-ever UK national guidance for doctors on how to diagnose Aortic Dissection.

[www.thinkaorta.net](http://www.thinkaorta.net)

Gareth explains: "As I recovered from my Aortic Dissection in 2016, I came to realise that most of the 4,000 people in the UK who are affected by this condition each year are not so lucky. The vast majority lose their lives. When the national patient association, which I now Chair, looked at the data, we were able to show that up to 1,000 lives a year could be saved, if we tackle the problem of misdiagnosis of Aortic Dissection in A&E."

The patient-led **THINK AORTA** campaign was launched in 2017 and quickly attracted the support of the leading professional medical societies. In 2018, with the support of charity **Heart Research UK**, tubes of **THINK AORTA** posters were delivered to every A&E Department in the UK and Ireland. A **THINK AORTA** podcast was produced, featuring patients and doctors talking about the condition. It quickly became the most-downloaded podcast ever from the **Royal College of Emergency Medicine's** online learning platform. In 2019, the campaign attracted the attention of the then **Secretary of State for Health, Matt Hancock**, who invited the patient association to meet him at the Department of Health and pledged his support, recording this video:

**[VIDEO LINK: Matt Hancock champions the THINK AORTA campaign](#)**

Aortic Dissection affects people of all ages and backgrounds. Haleema explains: "I survived an Aortic Dissection in 2017 while pregnant at the age of 21. The five heart operations I had, while pregnant, to save my life had a devastating effect on my health and that of my unborn child. Fortunately, my daughter and I survived, though the effects are life-changing and we both now need long-term medical care. During my recovery I met Gareth and last year I became Vice-Chair of the national patient association. Together, we are on a mission to raise awareness and prevent the problem of misdiagnosis affecting other Aortic Dissection patients, especially pregnant women, like it did me. The **THINK AORTA** campaign is amazingly effective. It is a life-saver."

During **Patient Safety Awareness Week** from 13-19<sup>th</sup> March, the national patient association wants to raise public awareness of Aortic Dissection and to highlight the new national guidance on diagnosing the condition for the benefit of the medical profession, especially A&E staff and Radiologists.

"To save lives in Aortic Dissection, doctors, nurses and paramedics simply need to learn to **THINK AORTA**, then do the CT scan and transfer the patient quickly to a specialist Aortic centre for treatment" says Gareth. "All of the resources needed to do this are available on our campaign website. Haleema and I regularly help NHS Trusts to run **THINK AORTA** education sessions featuring real patient stories. In fact, we are doing one at **United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust** during Patient Safety Awareness Week."

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. Background info at [thinkaorta.net](http://thinkaorta.net) & [aorticdissectionawareness.org](http://aorticdissectionawareness.org)
2. Photos enclosed. Please credit: Aortic Dissection Awareness.

**Unexplained Severe Pain?**  
**THINK AORTA**

Aortic Dissection is an emergency that is often fatal when missed

**CT Scan for a definitive diagnosis**

**Symptoms**

- Pain is the #1 symptom
- Neck, back, chest or abdomen
- Numbness or weakness in any limbs
- History of collapse

**Pain characteristics can be:**

- Maximal in seconds
- Migratory & transient
- Pain can be sharp, tearing, ripping

**Patient Risk Factors**

- Hypertension
- Aortic aneurysm
- Bicuspid aortic valve
- Familial aortic disease
- Marfan and other connective tissue disorders

**Physical Examination**

- Pulse deficit or vascular signs
- Neurological signs of stroke or paraplegia

**Diagnostic Warning**

- Chest x-ray, ECG, ultrasound & blood tests can be normal

Aortic Dissection Awareness UK in collaboration with:  
 Heart Research UK  
 Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery in Great Britain and Ireland  
 The Royal College of Emergency Medicine

www.thinkaorta.net

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine  
 &  
 The Royal College of Radiologists

Best Practice Guideline

**Diagnosis of Thoracic Aortic Dissection in the Emergency Department**

RCR  
 The Royal College of Radiologists

Royal College of Emergency Medicine

November 2021

The 5-year patient-led THINK AORTA campaign led to the publication of national guidance to save up to 1,000 lives a year in Aortic Dissection.



The President of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, Dr. Katherine Henderson, welcomes two Aortic Dissection patients and their THINK AORTA campaign to the College's annual conference in 2019.