

EAPCI Valve for Life initiative

The EAPCI Valve for Life initiative was launched in 2015. Building on the success of the Stent for Life initiative, the project aimed to “improve access to transcatheter valve intervention across Europe”. The four key objectives of the Valve for Life initiative are to raise awareness of the importance of valvular heart disease in the general population, to facilitate access to transcatheter heart valve interventions, to raise educational standards and thereby reduce obstacles to therapy implementation, and to diminish age and gender discrimination in access to care. Each participating country identifies the barriers to access to transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI) in their country and uses EAPCI funding to overcome these.

Poland was one of the two pilot countries involved in the Valve for Life initiative. Led by their Country Champions, Dariusz Dudek and Adam Witkowski, the Polish campaign educated the general public about aortic stenosis and TAVI as well as providing screening examinations. Importantly, collaboration with government has led to increased funding for TAVI. TAVI has continued to grow throughout Poland, and, whilst still falling short of the goals of the campaign, there has been a significant increase in access for the general population. The Polish Valve for Life initiative expanded in 2018 to include mitral and tricuspid valve interventions, though their numbers remain low.

France was the second pilot country in the Valve for Life initiative and successfully collected data to demonstrate the discrepancy between the requirement for and actual implementation of TAVI. Following presentation of these data at national and international events as well as to the French government, the number of reimbursed TAVI valves increased,

and the attention was turned to mitral valve interventions. The MITRA registry was a prospective two-year registry of patients with severe mitral valve disease who were not suitable for surgery and who were subsequently treated by percutaneous mitral valve intervention.

Portugal joined the initiative in 2017, promoted by the national society. The Portuguese Valve for Life initiative developed the “Hearts of Tomorrow” campaign to raise awareness of aortic and mitral valve disease and their diagnosis and treatment amongst the general population and medical community. Involvement with government has been key to increasing TAVI numbers, as well as the support of cardiologists and general practitioners countrywide. Portugal has achieved a 287% increase in TAVI procedures since the implementation of the campaign.

The United Kingdom was selected as the fourth country to join the initiative due to having one of the lowest numbers of TAVI procedures and TAVI centres per million population. There are significant geographical variations in TAVI access throughout the country and, due to long waiting lists, increased hospitalisations of patients on the waiting list for TAVI as well as mortality in patients on the waiting list. The United Kingdom has launched a public information campaign in collaboration with the charity Heart Valve Voice and offers screening for heart valve disease to members of the public. A fast track algorithm for the treatment of severe aortic stenosis has been proposed.

Through initiatives such as Valve for Life, we are able to highlight inequities in care within individual countries and between EAPCI member countries in order to improve the quality of care and quality of life for patients with heart valve disease.