



PARKINSON'S AUSTRALIA INC.

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Media Release

12 October 2011

One in every 350 Australians lives with Parkinson's Disease

Now - One in 350 Australians affected by Parkinson's Disease - and it's growing – 30 more people are diagnosed with the disease each day.

A report to be released on Wednesday shows that Australia's second commonest neurological disease, Parkinson's Disease, is growing in numbers (by 17% over the last six years), is commoner than prostate, bowel and many other cancers; the estimated burden of the disease for 2011-12 is valued at \$7.6 billion and 20% of PD sufferers are of working age.

"It is very difficult for a lot of people affected by early onset Parkinson's in terms of remaining in the workplace", said Kate Stone-Crouch, 39, who was diagnosed with the disease 2 years ago. "because Parkinson's is very difficult to diagnose, many people leave the work force – or their chosen job_ because they feel misunderstood or ridiculed, Most cannot cope with a regular office environment once symptoms become pronounced, so they choose not to work at all."

Kate chooses to work from home mainly due to her inability to handle large amounts of stress, to engage with others for long periods of time or to stay still. "What we really need is for the community and employers to understand that even though people with early onset Parkinson's may have to take more time to do tasks, our intellect remains unimpaired and we can still contribute to the workforce. Parkinson's is something we learn to live with, not something we die from. More funding and education are vital to our quality of life."

Kate said, " Parkinson's is not just about older people with 'the shakes', it is affecting a lot of younger people and we are not receiving the recognition that is essential to a wider public awareness of who we are."

"This report has delved deeply and shows the impact of Parkinson's on individuals, families, the health care system and the nation," explains Daryl Smeaton, CEO of Parkinson's Australia.

"Parkinson's cost the Australian economy approximately \$775 million in 2011-12, including approximately \$480 million in health system costs and \$110 million in lost productivity. In addition, the estimated burden of disease in 2011-12 is valued at \$7.6 billion, in terms of lost quality of life and premature mortality for people with Parkinson' ," Daryl Smeaton said.

“The headline findings of the Report are that;

- **30 people are diagnosed with Parkinson’s every day;**
- **20% of people affected are of working age;**
- **the average person lives for about 12 years from diagnosis (although it can be a lot longer);**
- **Parkinson’s is commoner than prostate, bowel and many other cancers;**
- **it costs people with Parkinson’s about \$12,000 a year out of their own pockets;**
- **every year nearly 50,000 years of healthy life are lost to the condition;**
- **numbers have grown 17% in the last six years and costs by over 48%.”**

“With many medical practitioners unaware of the full impact of Parkinson’s disease, often diagnosis is delayed and treatment options do not extend to the full range of disabilities associated with the condition,” Ms Stone-Crouch said.

Senator Carol Brown, Senator for Tasmania and Convenor of the Parliamentary Friends of Parkinson’s said the Report was critical in raising awareness about the prevalence and profile of the disease.

“This report helps us to better understand the prevalence and profile of Parkinson’s disease in Australia.

“The key findings offer new insights and opportunities to better support and improve the lives of people suffering from Parkinson’s disease,” Senator Carol Brown said.

“Yet while the report clearly shows we under invest in supporting people with Parkinson’s, the report shows that there are some simple solutions which can save money and improve people’s lives,” claims Daryl Smeaton. **“For instance it’s known that having a specialist Parkinson’s nurse can avoid tens of thousands of dollars worth of unnecessary consultations and improve people’s wellbeing.**

“Believe it or not, Parkinson’s is not a priority under the chronic disease strategy of the Australian Government’s National Chronic Disease Strategy, and is therefore not able to access that funding. **Over a lifetime, people with Parkinson’s experience greater disability than people with any of the conditions that are funded as chronic (including cancer, diabetes, heart disease, stroke and vascular disease).”**

“The other thing about this report that’s important to me is that it confirms that the community in general, and probably many medical practitioners, aren’t as aware of the full impact of Parkinson’s as they ought to be. That means things are missed and we don’t get treatment for our full range of disabilities,” says Kate Stone-Crouch.

Background

Parkinson’s is a disease of the central nervous system, which in this case, means the brain. There is degeneration of nerve cells, or neurons, which control muscle activity and in recent years it’s been realised that a wider range of brain cells are affected causing far more than movement problems.

The cause is unknown but there are theories such as:

Accelerated ageing - Parkinson’s may be an acceleration of the normal, age-related deterioration of neurons.

Oxidative damage - from free radicals which are unstable and potentially damaging molecules generated through normal chemical reactions in the body.

Environmental toxins - there have been examples of toxins causing Parkinson's like symptoms which has led some to believe that there could be environmental causes.

Genetic predisposition - 15% to 20% of PWP have a close relative who has also experienced PD symptoms.

The Report, is an update of the 2007 Deloitte Access Economics "Living With Parkinson's Disease" Report and uses data from a wide variety of reliable sources to form its conclusions.

Issued on behalf of Parkinson's Australia.

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