

Diabetes Research Charity issues a call to arms on World Diabetes Day

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NEWS RELEASE

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Further support for diabetes research is needed says JDRF

On World Diabetes Day (Sunday 14th November 2004), Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF), the world's largest voluntary funder of diabetes research, issues a call to arms to the diabetes community to put further weight behind the search for a cure for type 1 diabetes, the most severe form of a condition that affects approximately 1.8 million people in the UK alone

Type 1 diabetes is an auto-immune condition that affects an estimated 4.9 million people around the world and is not caused by obesity. It usually develops in childhood, leaving the individual dependent on multiple daily insulin injections and blood tests simply to stay alive. However these do not prevent the long term complications of diabetes which include blindness, limb amputations, kidney failure, heart disease and strokes.

"Until 1921, when insulin was discovered, type 1 diabetes carried a death sentence" said Annwen Jones, Chief Executive of JDRF. "Thanks to this discovery millions of people around the world can now live with type 1 diabetes by adhering to a strict daily regime of insulin injections and blood tests throughout life. However, not only does diabetes cost the NHS 9% of its budget each year to treat, it carries the risk of a host of complications that are not prevented by insulin injections. It is time for the diabetes and medical community to mobilise and put a stop to this once and for all; only research will enable us to find a cure."

JDRF has funded, at least in part every major breakthrough in diabetes research in the last 30 years, such as research that has led to the successful transplantation of insulin producing islets into 300 people with type 1 diabetes, including three in the UK, enabling their bodies to produce insulin and reducing their dependency on injections. However there are still problems with this treatment. Islet transplant patients must take immuno-suppressant drugs to stop their bodies attacking the new cells and there is still only a very small supply of islets available for transplantation.

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For this reason JDRF is focusing its significant funding ability on overcoming the islet supply bottleneck, particularly through stem cell research, which the charity believes is the current best hope for a cure for diabetes. Stem cells have the remarkable potential to repair or replace tissues and organs damaged by disease or disability. However much research is needed to understand how stem cells work and how their potential could be harnessed.

Since the last World Diabetes Day, JDRF has co-funded two new initiatives into stem cell research. A new centre of excellence at the University of Cambridge will concentrate on harnessing the capacity of stem cells to form any type of cell in order to find ways to replace cells in vulnerable tissues that have been lost through disease, thereby developing effective treatments for currently incurable diseases including type 1 diabetes, Parkinson's disease and Multiple Sclerosis.

A further JDRF collaboration is the centre of excellence opened at the University of Edinburgh to speed the development of stem cell therapies from the laboratory to the clinic, bridging the gap between fundamental stem cell research and clinical applications

Singer and Actress Sarah Caltieri, an ardent JDRF supporter who bravely showed her struggle to adapt to life with diabetes-related blindness in Channel 4's recent series 'Picking up the Pieces' commented: "I lost my sight aged 23 due to problems controlling my blood sugar levels whilst I was a teenager and, although I now have my sugar levels under control, I still run the risk of further complications. I strongly feel it is time for more organisations to focus on curing diabetes before it rages its terrible effects on the next generation. More support for research is needed from other public, voluntary and private sources."

For further information about developments in diabetes research visit www.jdrf.org.uk

Ends

Notes to Editors

World Diabetes Day

World Diabetes Day (WDD) is organised by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) in collaboration with the World Health Organization < <http://www.who.int/diabetes> > (WHO) and aims to raise awareness of diabetes around the world.

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Or visit www.jdrf.org.uk

About Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation

Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (registered charity no 295716) was founded in 1986 and is affiliated to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International, the leading charitable funder and advocate of type 1 diabetes research worldwide.

Since inception JDRF has been responsible for more than £500 million direct funding of the most promising and groundbreaking research around the world, including £65 million for 500 grants, centres and fellowships in 19 countries in 2002 alone. The charity has funded, at least in part, every major research breakthrough in the last thirty years, and focuses on research with the greatest impact, leading to a cure as soon as possible. JDRF is not restricted by geography or conventions.

JDRF actively supports new research angles such as stem cells and therapeutic islet transplantation and has successfully advocated for a combined £535 million in government funding for type 1 diabetes research through to 2008 around the world. JDRF seeks to bring together top scientists and has unique partnerships with public and private entities, such as the MRC and the Wellcome Trust, in some of the UK's most groundbreaking diabetes related research.

The charity's focus on mission-driven science clearly sets it apart from other charitable organisations, while its business world model demands strategic planning, rigorous external evaluation

and 'bottom-line' accountability based on the success of research funding.

JDRF is unique in its approach (volunteer-driven), its scope (a private/public collaborative effort that funds more than £165 million in type 1 diabetes research annually) and its success (more than 30 years of driving scientific breakthroughs).

About diabetes

Diabetes is a chronic condition that impairs the body's ability to use food properly. The hormone insulin metabolises glucose to provide energy, it is vital for life.

In type 1 diabetes the body produces no insulin, its causes are not entirely known but scientists believe the body's own immune system destroys the insulin producing cells; and it cannot be prevented. It usually develops in childhood and insulin injections and multiple daily blood tests are essential to stay alive. However these do not cure diabetes or prevent the long term, potentially devastating complications including blindness, amputations, kidney failure, heart disease and strokes.

In type 2 diabetes the body is unable to produce enough insulin or to use it effectively. Usually type 2 diabetes can be managed with diet, exercise and oral medication, although some are treated with insulin.

It is estimated that 4.9 million people globally have type 1 diabetes. It represents the most severe form of a condition that annually accounts for almost £2.5 billion in healthcare costs in the U.K. alone and represents 4.3% of the total NHS budget. Diabetes and its complications cost £5.2 billion each year, 9% of the NHS budget – 4.3% is spend on type 1 diabetes alone.