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Inactivity risks long term health of 1.6 million cancer survivors

Doctors fail to inform cancer patients about benefits of exercise as charity call for exercise to be 'prescribed'

1.6 million cancer survivors¹ could be at greater risk of serious long term health problems and some are at greater risk of recurrence of cancer because they are not physically active enough², a new report³ by Macmillan Cancer Support says.

Macmillan's report, *Move More*, reveals startling new evidence showing just how important physical activity is to the recovery and long term health of cancer patients. Four key findings in the report are:

- breast cancer patients' risk of recurrence and of dying from the disease can be reduced by up 40% by doing recommended levels⁴ of physical activity⁵,
- bowel cancer patients' risk of recurrence and of dying from the disease can be reduced by around 50% by doing significant amounts of physical activity⁶,
- prostate cancer patients' risk of dying from the disease can be reduced by up to 30% by doing recommended levels of physical activity⁷, and
- After treatment all cancer patients can reduce their risk of getting side effects of cancer and its treatment by doing recommended levels of

General

physical activity. These include fatigue, depression, osteoporosis and heart disease.

Yet despite strong emerging evidence that being physically active could dramatically improve cancer patients recovery and long term health, a survey by Macmillan Cancer Support⁸ found that many health professionals are not aware of this and the majority are not talking to their patients about it. Over half (56%) of GPs, practice nurses, oncologists and cancer nurses do not speak to their patients about the possible benefits of physical activity, or at best they speak to just a few of them. This rises to 72% of GPs and 60% of oncologists.

Ciaran Devane, Chief Executive of Macmillan Cancer Support said:

“The evidence in our report, *Move More*, shows just how important physical activity is to the recovery process of cancer. Yet very little attention to its benefits is given by health professionals or by those commissioning health services. It is essential that physical activity services are available and ‘prescribed’ to all cancer patients.

“Cancer patients would be shocked if they knew just how much of a benefit physical activity could have on their recovery and long term health, in some cases reducing their chances of having to go through the gruelling ordeal of treatment all over again.

“It doesn’t need to be anything too strenuous, doing the gardening, going for a brisk walk or a swim all count. Health professionals can refer patients to a variety of services such as physiotherapy, specialist exercise programmes at leisure centres or walking groups.”

General

Traditionally cancer patients were told to “rest up” after their cancer treatment and to “take it easy”, yet *Move More* shows that this approach is outdated and could actually put cancer patients at risk.

Jane Maher, Chief Medical Officer of Macmillan Cancer Support and leading clinical oncologist said:

“The advice that I would have previously have given to one of my patients would have been to ‘take it easy’. This has now changed significantly because of the recognition that if physical exercise were a drug, it would be hitting the headlines.

“There really needs to be a cultural change, so that health professionals see physical activity as an integral part of cancer after care, not just a optional add-on.”

Jane, 57, from Christchurch, took part in ‘prescribed’ exercise course following treatment. She says:

“Before I was diagnosed with breast cancer I didn’t really do much exercise. I felt pretty down and exhausted after my treatment – it really knocked it out of me.

“I was referred to the BACSUP programme⁹, where I was given 12 weeks free use of the gym and regular meetings with a specially trained fitness instructor. They suggested I go along to a dragon boat racing group for women who’ve had breast cancer. I loved it so much, I’m still taking part.

“I feel like a completely different person. I’m much more confident, am much less tired and feel so much better. Who could have imagined me being so full of life after everything I’ve been through?”

*****Case studies available*****

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For further information, please contact:

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Notes to Editors:

Move More is a comprehensive evidence review of over 60 studies, a survey of 400 health professionals, and studied findings from pilot schemes which are commissioning and running physical activity services for cancer patients.

Further Information/Sources:

¹ Estimates have been calculated by applying the physical activity rates of the general public from most recent data to the total population of people living with and beyond cancer, adjusting for age and gender. We assume the rate amongst the general public is the same as people living with and beyond cancer. Sources: NHS Information Centre, Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly Government, and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland. Maddams J, et al. Cancer prevalence in the United Kingdom: estimates for 2008. *British Journal of Cancer*. 2009. 101: 541-547

² 'Enough' is used here to mean recommended levels of physical activity, which for adults is 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a week. See Department of Health (2011) *Start Active, Stay Active*, A report on physical activity for health from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers. Link to guidance below:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_127931

³ Macmillan Cancer Support (2011) *Move More: Physical activity the underrated 'wonder drug'*. This report highlights evidence reviewed as part of Macmillan's more detailed 2011 report *The importance of physical activity for people living with and beyond cancer: A concise evidence review*.

⁴ Recommended levels of physical activity for adults are 150 minutes moderate intensity activity a week. See Department of Health (2011) *Start Active, Stay Active*, A report on physical activity for health from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers. Link to guidance below:

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⁵ Increasing the amount of moderate intensity physical activity up to recommended levels can help reduce breast cancer patients' risk of dying from the disease and of recurrence by up to 40%, compared to those doing less than an hour a week.

⁶ Bowel cancer patients doing around 6 hours of moderate intensity physical activity a week could help reduce their risk of dying from the disease by around 50% compared to those doing less than an hour a week. Evidence from two studies also shows that bowel cancer patients doing around 6 hours of physical activity a week could help reduce their risk of cancer coming back by around 50%, compared to those doing less than an hour a week.

⁷ Doing recommended levels of physical activity can help reduce prostate cancer patients' risk of dying from the disease by up to 30% compared to those doing less than an hour a week.

⁸ Macmillan Cancer Support/ICM online survey of 400 health professionals who deal with cancer patients (100 GPs, 100 practice nurses, 100 oncologists, and 100 oncology nurses, of whom 52 were oncology clinical nurse specialists). Fieldwork conducted 23 May-12 June 2011. Survey results are unweighted

⁹ BACSUP is the Bournemouth Active After Cancer Programme run by the charity BH Live in funded by Macmillan Cancer Support and Department of Health, where cancer survivors are 'prescribed' exercise by their clinical nurse specialist and supported throughout the 12 weeks.

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In the first year, blood pressure had dropped in 90% of the patients with previous high readings, 93 per cent had improved cardiovascular fitness, and 59% lost weight. As many as 94% said they felt less tired, 97% had improved well-being and all felt their self-image had been boosted.

About Macmillan Cancer Support

Macmillan Cancer Support improves the lives of people affected by cancer, providing practical, medical, emotional and financial support. Working alongside people affected by cancer, Macmillan works to improve cancer care.

Call the Macmillan Support Line on 0808 808 00 00, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. Calls are free, including from mobiles or visit www.macmillan.org.uk

Celebrity Supporters for the campaign

Jo Brand, Joanna Scanlan and Peter Capaldi of *Getting On* took part in a comedy sketch to promote the *Move More* campaign. The film is available at www.macmillan.org.uk/movemore or at www.youtube.com/macmillancancer. It was created by Steve Chung and Helen Jones of Rufus Leonard and directed by Ben Snedley from Outsider TV.

Corporate support for the campaign

The National Gardens Scheme (NGS) and their president Joe Swift are supporting the 'Move More' campaign by encouraging people to get gardening for the benefit of their health. Gardening is a great way to get active. It is an excellent way to improve strength, endurance, mobility and flexibility, with a range of activities to suit all ages, abilities, energy levels and gardens. To help you get started www.ngs.org.uk/macmillan-move-more-gardening-hints-and-tips for hints and tips from NGS gardeners, or to find a local NGS garden to visit for inspiration.

As part of a long-term partnership, Boots UK is supporting Macmillan's physical activity campaign by encouraging customers to get active. In all of its 2,500 stores from 10 August until 6 September 2011, customers can pick up a leaflet highlighting the benefits of physical activity when going through cancer. This will sit alongside a leaflet encouraging people to get active and raise money for Macmillan. This is part of its Miles for Macmillan activity – to clock up 290,000 miles, one mile for each person diagnosed with cancer every year in the UK. During this time, there will also be in store brand presence and a 5p donation being made to Macmillan for purchases of selected toiletries.

Macmillan Cancer Support and Boots UK are working together to deliver more ways to access information about living with cancer on the high street, in local communities and online and increase awareness of the breadth of vital services that Macmillan provides.