



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Action for Brain Injury Week 17 – 23 May 2010

The growing silence: alcohol-related brain injury on the rise

17 May 2010, Rugby - Swanswell, a national charity that helps people overcome drug, alcohol and other problem behaviour, has identified a silent epidemic of alcohol-related brain injury (ARBI) sufferers and has developed a pioneering treatment programme to help.

ARBI is a term used to describe physical impairment to the brain linked to excessive alcohol consumption and some refer to it as alcohol-related dementia. It is estimated, in the UK, that 12.5% of dementias in the under 65's (Harvey et al., 1998)¹ are alcohol-related.

ARBI can affect everyone, not just stereotypical heavy drinkers, but is often undiagnosed in patients due to lack of knowledge and screening in the healthcare industry and a large number of different symptoms being apparent in patients such as memory loss, depression, loss of balance and tingling, numbness and pain in the hands, feet and legs.

Looking to the future, it is expected that the incidence of ARBI will rise as alcohol consumption increases (Gupta, S., Warner, J., 2008)² so as drinking levels increase in the UK, this condition will become more prevalent.

The good news is that there is evidence to suggest ARBI can be managed and its effects counteracted to a degree, especially if diagnosed early.

[MORE]

If the right intervention is received, 25% of people can recover completely and another 25% can recover enough to lead independent lives (Smith, I., Hillman, A., 1999)³.

Despite this evidence, government policy has failed to highlight and make any provision for people with ARBI by developing a clear national strategy.

Swanswell, after reviewing the evidence in conjunction with Coventry University, felt this was an area which deserved further attention and produced a paper to be published in a recognised academic journal detailing their ground-breaking treatment pilot plans, in the north of England, which will be evaluated by qualified psychologists.

The flexible and tailored treatment programme includes delivering effective interventions such as an abstinence-based routine, cognitive rehabilitation exercises, working with carers of the individual and social behaviour network therapy in order to maximise rehabilitation, move towards independence and reduce service provision costs.

Maggie Philbin, presenter and trustee of Swanswell said: *'Alcohol-related brain injury (ARBI) is an overlooked and poorly understood area with huge impact on individuals and family members. The good news is that some cases of ARBI can be treated and an effective treatment programme can be potentially life-changing for the patient and family members.'*

[ENDS]

References

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2. Gupta, S., Warner, J., 2008. 'Alcohol-related dementia: a 21st-century silent epidemic?' The British Journal of Psychiatry 193, 351–353
3. Smith, I., Hillman, A., 1999. 'Management of alcohol Korsakoff Syndrome' Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, vol. 5, pp. 271-278

Notes for editors

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About Swanswell

Swanswell is a national charity that helps people overcome drug, alcohol and other problem behaviour. We believe that everyone deserves the chance to change and to be happy. We help them to remove the things that stand in their way, whether physical, emotional or practical. So, as their lives improve, they can feel well, do well, and stay well. Swanswell has a reputation for innovation and is a leading developer of new services which help people to change their lives for the better.

www.swanswell.org

About Maggie Philbin

Maggie Philbin has worked in radio and television for 30 years on a wide range of science, medical and technology programmes. Currently providing analysis and comment on technology and a regular reporter on BBC 1's "Inside Out", she has a unique resonance with audiences, having grown up with them on much loved shows like "Swap Shop", "Hospital Watch" and "Tomorrow's World". Maggie has personal experience of the effect alcohol misuse can have on an individual and their family.