



PRESS RELEASE

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BRAIN TUMOURS: LEADING CAUSE OF CANCER DEATH IN CHILDREN

Brain tumours are now the leading cause of childhood cancer death in the UK but brain tumour research is 'woefully under-funded' and a 'poor relation to other cancers' according to brain tumour charities and medical experts. Figures released today show that the number of children dying from a brain tumour in 2007 was 33% higher than in 2001; child deaths from leukaemia were 39% lower than in 2001 (1). More children and people under the age of 40 die from a brain tumour in the UK than any other form of cancer. 65% more women die from a brain tumour than from cervical cancer (2). There is reportedly a 2% annual increase in the incidence of brain tumours, but some experts have seen the number of cases of brain tumours double over the past year.

Despite these statistics, brain tumour research is seriously under-funded and has not received the same attention as other cancers. Brain tumours receive less than 1% of the national spend on cancer research in the UK (3). Very little is known about the causes and treatment of brain tumours and without more funding for research, experts will be no closer to understanding the rise in incidence and mortality.

Latest figures show that in 2006-7 UK Government funds dedicated to brain tumour research through the Medical Research Council amounted to just £970,000; total MRC expenditure was £89.5 million (4). Thanks to the extraordinary work of Leukaemia Research and other charities, higher profile cancers generate more than 20 times the funding than brain tumour charities (5).

Today, 14 brain tumour charities are 'putting their heads together' and launching a campaign to raise awareness and increase funding for vital research. 'Brain Tumour Research' is supported by brain tumour survivors Martin Kemp and Russell Watson and Sheila Hancock, whose grandson survived a brain tumour. Golfers Nick Faldo, Tony Jacklin and John O'Leary are also backing the campaign.

Sue Farrington Smith Director of Brain Tumour Research said:

“The statistics are shocking. In the UK more children and people under the age of 40 lose their lives to a brain tumour than any other cancer – yet it is woefully under-funded. We want to change that. We have seen what a difference increased funds for research has made for leukaemia and other cancers. I find it tragic that research into this killer has hardly moved forward in the last 10 years when my niece was taken from us, and the numbers of people affected are rising. Together we are going to fight for greater awareness and funding for this terrible disease.”

Professor Geoff Pilkington, Professor of Cellular and Molecular Neuro-oncology, University of Portsmouth said:

“I have worked in this area for over 35 years and sadly progress in research into brain tumours has been very slow. Brain tumour research is notoriously poorly funded and often viewed very much as a poor relation to other cancers. Unfortunately it appears to be getting worse. Yet a quarter of all cancers end up in the brain. This is urgent. There desperately needs to be an injection of money to put the building blocks in place so we can save lives.”

Mr Kevin O’Neill, Consultant Neurosurgeon, Honorary Clinical Senior Lecturer at Imperial College London said:

“Brain tumours are on the increase - reportedly in the region of 2% per year - but in my unit alone we have seen the number of brain tumour cases nearly double in the last year. Brain tumours can afflict anyone of us and are increasingly affecting a younger section of the population. They cause the biggest reduction in expected lifespan than any other cancer. Frustratingly malignant brain tumours have very few treatment options and we have nothing approaching a cure. Yet brain cancer research still receives less than 1% of the national spend on cancer research in this country. Without the drive and determination of charities trying to make a difference there may continue to be a lack of funding and hope. In joining forces to form the national organisation Brain Tumour Research there may now be a brighter future for all of us.”

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Russell Watson said:

“Having been through the trauma personally of two brain tumors myself, might I take this opportunity to point out the huge difference that charities like Brain Tumour Research can make. Brain tumour research and treatment is crucial and the funding of this needs to be raised significantly.”

Martin Kemp said:

“The diagnosis of a brain tumour is devastating. But if a tumour is found in time and you are given the right treatment, you can survive and live life to the full. This can’t be left to luck or chance. We need to understand more about brain tumours and research must be better funded so that they are diagnosed quickly and everyone gets the best treatment.”

Sheila Hancock said:

“It is terrible to watch a grandchild go through the diagnosis and treatment of a brain tumour, to see both your child and her child suffering. You feel so helpless. Unlike other cancers, so little is known about brain tumours and their causes. Increased funding for brain tumours is long over-due.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

“Brain Tumour Research” <http://www.braintumourresearch.org/> is a new initiative by a group of UK brain tumour charities to raise the profile and funding for brain tumour patients and improve their chances. Charities who have united together to create Brain Tumour Research include: Ali’s Dream, Andrea’s Gift, Anna’s Hope, Brain and Spine Foundation, Brain Tumour Action, Brain Tumour Research Campaign, Brainstrust, Brainwaves, Charlie’s Challenge, Children’s Brain Tumour Research Centre, Ellie Savage Memorial Trust, Hammer Out, Levi’s Star and The Diana Ford Trust. The charity will be formally launched at the House of Commons on Tuesday 28th April 4-6pm Dining Room A.

For further information about the launch please contact Brain Tumour Research on: 01296 733011

- 1) Office of National Statistics, Mortality Statistics: Deaths registered in 2007
- 2) Ibid
- 3) The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) is a partnership between government, charity and industry. In 2006 (latest figures available) brain and nervous system (CNS) expenditure £3.1million, total NRCI expenditure £393 million – brain and CNC expenditure as a percentage of that total 0.8%. House of Commons Hansard 15 July 2008, column 331W.
- 4) The Medical Research Council is one of the main agencies through which the Government supports medical and clinical research through the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills. In 2007/08, the MRC’s expenditure on cancer research amounted to £89.5 million. Research related to brain tumours was £970,000, for leukaemia it was £14 million. House of Commons Hansard 27 Jan 2009, column 455W.
- 5) For example, Leukaemia Research raises around £20million a year while brain tumour charities raise around £2million a year between them.