**DIABETES DOUBLES IN UK DESPITE RESEARCH ADVANCES**

**DRWF charity’s 20th anniversary marks ‘mounting challenge’ to NHS**

The Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation (DRWF) first opened its doors as a charity in the UK in 1998 yet, despite the many developments in the fields of diabetes research, treatment and education over the last 20 years, the number of people over the age of 16 diagnosed with the condition has more than doubled to 3.8 million, with type 2 diabetes driving this alarming growth.

“While we are proud to have funded over £11.5 million in significant research projects in the UK over our twenty-year history, the need for education and support is greater than ever,” stated DRWF Chief Executive Sarah Tutton.

“Diagnoses of all diabetes types in the UK have increased since 1998 when around 1.8 million people over the age of 16 were diagnosed with the condition to today’s more alarming figures of 3.8 million. It is undoubtedly the problems with type 2 diabetes that are driving this remarkable increase.”

DRWF was founded in Washington DC, USA, 25 years ago in 1993. In the UK it not only funded research but also developed a new educational programme by producing extensive support literature as well as an award-winning series of Diabetes Wellness Days in different parts of the country in a drive for better information available to people living with all forms of diabetes.

“Last year the charity won the Quality in Care Diabetes (QiC) Judges’ Special Award for ‘providing an outstanding educational event programme for people with diabetes’ after being highly commended in the Empowering People with Diabetes in the Self-Management category,” explained Tutton.

DRWF introduced its first Diabetes Wellness Day South in 2008 a change to the ad-hoc Diabetes Wellness Workshops that the charity had previously held. The 10th annual day was recently held at The Solent Hotel in Whiteley, Fareham and will be followed by a day in Kenilworth in October and one in Hartlepool in November.

“Along with a successful education programme the charity has a rigorous research funding process and over the last 20 years it has contributed more than £11.5m into research in the UK alone. This has included less well-known initiatives such as the development of islet cell transplantation at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford, a cornerstone of the mission, vision and values of DRWF’s parent organisation in the US. It has enabled us to fund the DRWF Islet Isolation Facility, which has been pivotal to the success of a national transplant programme and now includes a clinical element funded by the NHS,” highlighted Tutton.

The UK remains one of just a handful of countries currently providing islet transplants as a clinical therapy for a selection of people with type 1 diabetes. DRWF Research Manager Dr Eleanor Kennedy emphasised that in addition to supporting the development of clinical procedures for islet cell transplants, the charity awards important pump priming funding: “These relatively small amounts help researchers to try out new theories and to get vital pilot data that helps with future bids for more significant funding.”

This is an area that has drawn praise from health professionals such as Professor Graham Hitman, recently retired Consultant Diabetologist at Barts and the London School of Medicine, Queen Mary University of London: “Over the years, my colleagues and I at Barts and the London have received funding from DRWF that we are immensely grateful for. The small amounts of pump priming funding help those of us working in the diabetes world to ultimately leverage new funds from bigger organisations with deeper pockets. DRWF shows that it’s small but mighty!”

Shivani Misra, Consultant in Metabolic Medicine & Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer, Imperial College London has also benefitted from such early funding.

The DRWF funded my PhD in 2012 and that was a critical first step in getting me on the research ladder. I wouldn’t be where I am, without that initial funding! I am extremely grateful that the DRWF recognised the clinical importance of my area of research and am very proud of the on-going close relationship I have with them.

Shivani won the IDF European Researcher award at the end of 2017, she donated part of her winnings back to the charity.

Dr. Matthew Simmonds, Senior Lecturer, College of Science at the University of Lincoln added:

“Being awarded a DRWF fellowship enabled me to not only establish a brand-new research area looking at genetic predictors of long-tern pancreas transplant function but also provided the next critical step in my career as a scientist in setting up my own research group. Without the unique support offered by the DRWF, I wouldn’t have made numerous breakthroughs within this area. This has not only opened the doors to applying to other larger funders to continue expanding this work but has also enabled me to gain my first permanent academic position as a senior lecturer. Speaking on behalf of all DRWF fellows, being awarded a DRWF fellowship has had a truly transformational impact on both our research and future career trajectory.”

The increasing profile of diabetes has meant that the healthcare system has become acutely aware of the problem. As a result, advances in knowledge are paving the way to more tailored or personalised medicine through the identification of groups of patients who respond more effectively to certain treatments than others. Exciting advances in stem cell research have also hit the headlines over the past few years.

Two strands of research – one into the use of non-islet cells from the patients themselves and the second revolving around the regeneration of beta cells – continue apace in international efforts.

DRWF UK Chief Executive Tutton added: “The goal is that, one day, renewable sources of cells will be available to stop the progress of type 1 diabetes in its tracks and to offer people stem cell therapies that replace damaged pancreatic beta cell tissue.

“With so much having been done over the past 20 years since DRWF started its UK operations, it is perhaps difficult to comprehend what the next two decades will bring: New clinical trials, most definitely. New insulins and more refined, technologically advanced devices, certainly. But the growing challenge of the explosion in type 2 diabetes can only be halted with better education around healthier lifestyle choices and improved management for those who will inevitably have to live with all forms of diabetes until a cure is found.”

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