

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday 8 October 2012

MEDIA RELEASE

Exercise stretches across The Min

Patients, rheumatologists, physiotherapists and representatives from the National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society are stretching at the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NSH Foundation Trust (known locally as the 'Min') on Thursday 11 October at 5.00pm to raise the profile of exercise in the treatment for Ankylosing Spondylitis.

“Exercise is the single most important thing you can do to help yourself” says Dr Raj Sengupta, Consultant Rheumatologist at The Min “Ankylosing spondylitis is a condition for life and during its course it may affect patients differently at different times but the fitter and more flexible they are, the better able they will be to deal with the stiffness and pain associated with AS”.

Dr Sengupta who heads up the 2 week residential course for people with AS at The Min is a strong advocate for exercise in conjunction with medical interventions and can see a huge difference between patients who regularly exercise and those that don't. “The quality of life for people who are able to exercise regularly is much better than those who are not able to exercise. Even those with severe disease will benefit from exercise, albeit with a modified approach to exercise.

Exercise can take many forms and we are grateful that the National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society offers regular hydrotherapy and physiotherapy sessions through their network of branches in more than 80 locations throughout the UK including Bath, Bristol, Taunton, Somerset, Swindon and Yeovil. NASS also produced a free exercise app, Back to Action, that can be accessed from any iPhone or android device with exercise videos and expert guidance also available from their website. Exercise resources are freely available for everyone affected by AS wherever they are in the UK” says Dr Sengupta.

NASS Director, Debbie Cook says 'Teaming up with The Min to promote exercise for AS reinforces the exercise message. The Min holds a special place in the hearts of many people with AS, particularly those who have attended and benefited hugely from the 2 week course and those who were involved in the setting up of NASS at The Min more than 30 years ago. It is also a great opportunity to celebrate the NASS branch network which has been a lifeline over the years for many people with AS.'

"Not only do the branches provide regular exercise but they also provide access to a physiotherapist and support from other people with the same condition. People with AS often feel isolated as the condition does not have great public awareness. The 2 week AS course, the NASS branches and the free exercise programmes are fantastic resources for people with AS. We are looking forward to a good stretch to raise the profile of exercise for AS".

AS is a form of inflammatory arthritis that affects the spine and other joints. It is a painful progressive condition that if not diagnosed early enough or treated correctly can cause irreversible fusing of the spine. Drug therapy and exercise is the main treatment for AS. Exercise increases flexibility and mobility, improves posture and sleep and reduces the stiffness and pain experienced by many people with AS.

Anyone wishing to take part in the big Bath Stretch or would like to get in touch with a NASS branch should contact NASS on 020 8948 9117 or visit the website at www.nass.co.uk. Anyone who would like to make a donation to support NASS branches can go to www.virginmoneygiving.com/stretch4nass.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

- Dr Raj Sengupta & Debbie Cook are available for interview by appointment
- Images of Dr Raj Sengupta & Debbie Cook are available upon request
- Photo opportunities & interviews with patients available between 5.00pm and 7.00pm during the event on Thursday 11 October 2012 at the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases

ENQUIRIES

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KEY FACTS ABOUT AS

- *Ankylosing means fusing together. Spondylitis indicates inflammation of the vertebrae*
- *There are around 200,000 people in the UK with AS*
- *The average age when AS symptoms start is 24*
- *Diagnosis is slow with an average delay of 10 years from symptom onset*

CONT

- *AS can also be described as arthritis of the spine*
- *It is a long term condition and is incurable*
- *AS can affect other areas of the body including eyes, lungs and bowel*
- *Exercise is the single most important thing a person with AS can do to help themselves, while painkilling medication will help to reduce pain and improve sleep and general well being*
- *NASS has 83 active branches around the UK providing regular hydrotherapy and physiotherapy sessions supervised by a physiotherapist*
- *World Arthritis Day takes place on Friday 12 October 2012*

THE RNRHD

The RNRHD NHS FT is a national specialist rehabilitation and rheumatology hospital based in Bath.

Offering services to adults, children and young people, the trust has expertise in general and complex:

- Rheumatological and musculoskeletal conditions
- Neurological rehabilitation
- Chronic pain management
- Fatigue Management
- www.rnhrd.nhs.uk

ABOUT NASS

NASS was founded by a group of people with AS, doctors and physiotherapists at the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases in Bath in 1976. NASS provides physiotherapy groups, support and advice to patients and families, supports research and campaigns to raise awareness of AS and the needs of people with AS.

For more information, please visit www.nass.co.uk.