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Media Statement

MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING A MUST FOR YOUNG DIABETES PATIENTS: EXPERT

A visiting Melbourne Professor says with poor mental health now the leading complication facing young people with type 1 diabetes, mandatory screening must be introduced to help save lives.

Professor Fergus Cameron, the Head of Diabetes Services at the Royal Children's Hospital and group leader of the Diabetes research group at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, is being brought to Perth courtesy of the Diabetes Research Foundation of WA to present a public lecture on Monday July 11.

National Diabetes Week runs from July 10th to 16th, 2011.

Professor Cameron said with many of the typical complications such as kidney and eye disease now rarely seen in young people with type 1 diabetes, it was time to focus more funds on tackling mental health issues.

"There is much data to suggest that as many as one in three young diabetes patients are affected by depression, anxiety or eating disorders," he said.

"With ongoing mental health challenges in people with diabetes in their 20's and 30's, the time has come to implement mandatory screening, particularly before they move on to using adult health care services.

"Given that Australia remains in the top 10 countries with the highest rates of type 1 diabetes in children, dealing with so-called 'diabetes distress' needs to be given increased priority immediately."

Diabetes Research Foundation of WA (DRFWA) executive director Sherl Westlund said further funding for research into the psychological health of young people with type 1 diabetes was also needed.

"Studies to date have revealed that diabetes affects the brain directly because glucose is the primary cellular fuel of the brain but much more research is required to help scientists pinpoint ways of stopping the condition impacting on brain development," she said.

"Only with awareness of the psychological health issues that can potentially impact those with diabetes are we going to see a boost in support for research to turn this trend around."

An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report released in August 2010 revealed that, on average, every day there are two new cases of type 1 diabetes in Australian children and that there were more than 8,000 new cases of type 1 diabetes in Australian children during the period 2000-2008. It also showed the incidence of type 1 diabetes in Australian children increased from 19 to 24 new cases per 100,000 population between 2000 and 2004, at an average rate of 6.2 percent a year, but did not change significantly between 2005 and 2008.

Professor Cameron's public lecture entitled *'Growing up with type 1 diabetes: ages, stages and challenges'* is taking place on Monday July 11 at 5pm at Princess Margaret Hospital. The event is free but places must be reserved by emailing sherl@diabetesresearchfoundation.asn.au(.)