

Finding Freedom - April is Parkinson's Awareness Month

Alberta, March 22, 2018

Imagine for a moment if you will, getting ready to go out for a walk or a run. You lace up your shoes, zip up your coat and step out your door. The breeze on your face, the steady rhythm of your feet hitting the path, the joy you feel as you move...its contentment, its happiness, its freedom!

Now envision this...Though you know how to tie your own shoes, you've been doing it since you were five, it is a struggle today because your medication hasn't kicked in yet and those fine motor skills that you took for granted since you were five only exist on good days. Same goes for the zipper on your coat. You are lucky though; you have a loved one at home to help you zip it up, you know some who don't. You're frustrated though because at 48 you never thought you'd need help zipping a coat.

Now to step out the door, "it won't happen today" you think to yourself; "it's just a doorway". The door is open, you can see the blue skies and the path beckoning, but your feet won't move. "Not today...I just want to have a good day!" You are frozen, it happens more often these days, and your confidence begins to wane. At 64, walking through a doorway shouldn't be a problem.

You finally make it through the doorway and down to the walking path. "Right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot"... for a while you feel the freedom that the movement brings, but all too soon your legs feel heavy, maybe you even stumble. The fear sets in, "what if I fall", "what if there is no one around to help me". You stop, turn around and head home, feeling defeated and angry and sad. You are 36 and Parkinson disease has begun to steal your freedom.

Sometimes it begins with a hand tremor, or an involuntary shudder. Sometimes, it's just the feeling of being tongue-tied or too tired to speak. The symptoms can hit anyone at any age, and they get progressively worse until speech, movement and cognition become severely impaired. There is no cause, and no cure. While many people have heard of Parkinson disease, few know what it is until they or a loved one are diagnosed.

Parkinson disease is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's disease, with an incidence rate that is predicted to rise by almost 50% in the next 20 years. Few people truly understand what it means to have Parkinson disease or that it is so much more than visible tremors. Anxiety and depression, apathy, cognitive issues and sleep disturbances all play a role in life with Parkinson disease.

For over 40 years, Parkinson Association of Alberta has been the only charitable organization dedicated to improving the wellbeing and day-to-day lives of Albertans living with and affected by Parkinson disease and related disorders. Across the province we provide no cost specialized support services, education, referrals, information and resources and low-cost programming to those living with Parkinson disease, their families and care partners, and the community as a whole.

You are not alone; we are ready whenever you are; visit our website (www.parkinsonalberta.ca) or call our toll-free PD Helpline (1-877-243-9992) to get started on the journey to living well with Parkinson disease.

Arrangements can be made for interviews with both a Parkinson Association of Alberta spokesperson and either a client (person with Parkinson disease and/or a care partner) or a healthcare professional (depending on availability). If you are interested in presenting a story about Parkinson disease and the support system Parkinson Association of Alberta has in place for Albertans regardless of where they reside, I would be happy to make the necessary arrangements for information and interviews.

-30-

Media Contact:

Brandi La Bonte

Parkinson Association of Alberta

p: 780-868-6460 | blabonte@parkinsonalberta.ca

Facts

About Parkinson Association of Alberta:

- Parkinson Association of Alberta has a 40+ year history of helping to make every day better for Albertans affected by Parkinson disease;
- Parkinson Association of Alberta is a standalone, Alberta-based charitable organization;
- 100% of the money raised here funds the best services, resources and research to benefit Albertans;
- Parkinson Association of Alberta provides support services, programming, education, advocacy and funds for research;
- Parkinson Association of Alberta operates in seven regions (Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Lloydminster and Red Deer) and offers support groups and programming in 23 communities across the province;
- And, for those who do not have access to one of those communities or who prefer a different method of access, Parkinson Association of Alberta offers tele- options including a toll-free helpline, three (3) telephone support groups, an online assistance via our downloadable information and resources, and our Ask the Experts feature.

About Parkinson disease:

- Thousands of Albertans are coping with the slow deterioration of their bodies every day; there is no cure, but there is hope;
- Over 10,000 Albertans are living with a Parkinson disease diagnosis; and tens of thousands more in those who love and care for them;
- The average age of diagnoses is approximately 56;
- 20% of people with Parkinson disease are diagnosed before 50 years of age;
- 50% of those with Parkinson disease suffer from depression;
- 40% will develop difficulty chewing and swallowing; 89% will develop difficulty speaking; many develop a soft voice and can barely whisper; and
- Parkinson disease costs Alberta \$45.2 million/year in direct (including hospital care, physician care and drug expenditures) and indirect (mortality and morbidity) costs.