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## **Irish Rugby Star John Hayes Launches “Get Your Back Up!”**

### **Irish people urged not to dismiss lower back pain –**

**25<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

Irish International and Munster legend John Hayes, lined out today to launch “Get Your Back Up”, a public awareness campaign created to raise awareness of Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS). Currently it is thought that 44,000 Irish people suffer from this painful rheumatic disease.

Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS) mainly attacks the spine and sacroiliac joints but it can also affect other joints, tendons and ligaments. Left untreated the consequences of AS are detrimental to the sufferer often causing irreversible damage to the spine; stiffening of the rib cage; disability and a general reduction in quality of life.

Developed for the Ankylosing Spondylitis Association of Ireland (ASAI) and supported by an educational grant from Wyeth Ireland the campaign aims to highlight the symptoms and impact of AS; the importance of early detection; and the availability of innovative and effective new treatments. Often times through misdiagnosis an unnecessary delay of between 8-11 years can occur from the onset of symptoms to correct diagnosis of AS1. To mark the campaign the ASAI will launch a dedicated patient website which can be accessed through [www.getyourbackup.ie](http://www.getyourbackup.ie) In addition the ASAI has published “Touchpoints” brochures, a new resource for people with AS to help them better understand and manage their condition; advice on how to talk to their doctor about their diagnosis and treatment; and useful tips for living with AS. A hard-hitting infomercial will also be aired on national and regional radio stations encouraging people to take control and seek proper diagnosis and appropriate treatment of their chronic back pain.

Welcoming the campaign, Dr. Ronan Kavanagh MD MRCP, President of the Irish Society for Rheumatology, Consultant Rheumatologist, Galway Clinic said “Ankylosing Spondylitis is a common cause of disability in Ireland today affecting people across all age groups most specifically those in the 18 – 30 age bracket. Misdiagnosis can lead to years of inadequate and inappropriate treatment resulting in reduced quality of life for the individual concerned. It is imperative that we encourage patients and physicians alike to work together in pursuit of optimum treatment solution plans combining medication with exercise to maintain flexibility and good posture. Currently there are a number of promising options in the effective treatment of AS including revolutionary new biologic treatments, that work with the body to decrease inflammation, relieving pain while fighting the disease.”

Commenting on his involvement in the initiative, Irish rugby star John Hayes said “As a rugby player I am well aware of the seriousness of back pain and the limits it can place on your life. That is why I am delighted to be involved with the “Get Your Back Up” campaign. Too often back pain can be dismissed and people decide to live with it, not knowing that they may have a disease like AS which gets progressively worse over time. This campaign serves as a reminder that your back pain does not define you as a person; you don’t have to live with it; you are not alone; you can take action.”

Speaking at the launch, Seoirse Smith, Secretary of the Ankylosing Spondylitis Association of Ireland (ASAI) said “As a person living with AS myself, I know first-hand the importance of early diagnosis and maintaining a positive attitude. Many of our association members had never heard of Ankylosing Spondylitis and as a result lived with chronic back pain for years. This campaign serves to raise awareness of the disease and encourage people to ask their doctors about AS and seek out an appropriate treatment.”

According to Lisa McGirr MISCPC, Chartered Physiotherapist “My advice to patients with Ankylosing Spondylitis is to be assessed by a Chartered Physiotherapist who will devise a specific exercise and management programme tailored to the individual. Research shows that daily exercise reduces pain and stiffness, improves posture and function and is an important adjunct to medical management.”

Often dismissed as general back pain, Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS) is a chronic disease of the immune system that causes inflammation of the joints between the spinal bones and the spine and the pelvis. Without proper diagnosis, it eventually causes the affected spinal bones to join together, commonly known as bamboo spine.

Key symptoms of the disease include:

Pain, stiffness, or tenderness

- in the lower back, buttocks, shoulders, ribs, hips or thighs
- that has spread from the lower back and buttocks up the spine and into the neck
- that is worse at night, in the morning, or after inactivity;

- that can be relieved by activity or exercise
- that has lasted for more than 3 months
- that is accompanied by fatigue, mild fever, weight loss

For more information on ankylosing spondylitis visit [www.getyourbackup.ie](http://www.getyourbackup.ie).