

GALWAY HURLING STAR JOE CANNING LAUNCHES "GET YOUR BACK UP"!

23 June 2009. Galway hurling star **Joe Canning** today launches "***Get Your Back Up***", a public awareness campaign for **Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS)**. Up to an estimated 44,000 Irish people – mainly men – may suffer from this painful rheumatic disease that principally attacks the spine and sacroiliac joints.

Often dismissed as general back pain, 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. Men are up to three times more likely to develop AS than women¹, and often fob it off as an old sporting injury, or as hereditary. Without proper diagnosis and treatment, it eventually causes the affected spinal bones to join together, commonly known as **bamboo spine**.

On average, misdiagnosis can cause an unnecessary delay of between 8-11 years from the onset of symptoms to correct diagnosis of AS². Developed for the **Ankylosing Spondylitis Association of Ireland (ASAI)** and supported by an educational grant from **Wyeth Ireland**, the Get Your Back Up campaign aims to highlight the symptoms and impact of AS; the importance of early detection; and the availability of innovative and effective new treatments.

Welcoming the campaign, **Doctor Conor McCarthy, Medical Advisor to the ASAI** said "*Misdiagnosis of AS can lead to years of inadequate and inappropriate treatment resulting in reduced quality of life for the individual concerned. While the disease primarily affects men, from as young as 16 years old, it can also affect women. 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, **Galway Hurling star Joe Canning** said "*As an athlete I am well aware of the seriousness of back pain and the limits it can place on your life. I have to constantly listen to my body to ensure that I am match-fit. I am lucky*

¹ Spondylitis Association of America – www.spondylitis.org

² How to diagnose axial spondyloarthritis early; M Rudwaleit; D van der Heijde; M A Khan, J Braun, J Sieper

that I have easy access to team doctors and physios, so can ask them about any ache or pain. However many people just ignore back pain, or decide to live with it, not knowing that they may have a disease like AS. There is no reason to accept back pain – so get your back up about yours.”

Speaking of the condition, **AS patient and triathlete Andrew Bulter** said *“For years, my AS prevented me from physical activity and severely affected my life. I was finally diagnosed in 2006, and received the treatment that was right for me. Within six months, I was doing triathlons! I couldn’t believe that it was my own body swimming, running and cycling along side “triathletes” no less. I felt better than I had in years. If I can inspire one person to seek treatment for their pain and experience the transformation that I have, then I would be thrilled. I am proof that although I have AS, it doesn’t have me!”*

Speaking at the launch, **Seirse Smith, Secretary of Ankylosing Spondylitis Association of Ireland (ASAI)** said *“The ASAI believes that there is no need to suffer in silence. If you have any of the key symptoms of AS, I urge you to go to your doctor straight away. I put up with my back pain since I was a teenager, and it was not until I was in my 30s that I was diagnosed with AS. I have since been able to manage my symptoms through medicine and exercise. The ASAI is here to help anyone else who has or think that they might have AS, and we encourage you to use the ASAI as a resource.”*

The “Get Your Back Up” campaign includes a dedicated patient website www.getyourbackup.ie, an infomercial to be carried across national and regional radio, and the ASAI’s “Touchpoints” brochures: a resource designed to help people understand and manage their condition, including advice on how to talk to their doctor about their diagnosis and treatment and useful tips for living with AS.

For more information on ankylosing spondylitis visit www.getyourbackup.ie.

leading edge medicines.