



## Press Release

Monday 31 October 2011

- ∞ **New Pancreatic Cancer Action Survey reveals nearly half of pancreatic cancer sufferers hadn't heard of pancreatic cancer before their own diagnosis**
- ∞ **More worryingly 55% of patients' GPs and 46% of patients dismissed pancreatic cancer symptoms as nothing to worry about**

### **Rare Survivor and Pancreatic Cancer Action charity head spearheads drive for greater awareness of symptoms in November Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month**

In a recent survey carried out by [Pancreatic Cancer Action](#) of over 100 patients and carers, nearly half of patients hadn't heard of pancreatic cancer before their own diagnosis. More worryingly nearly 2/3 of GPs dismissed patients' symptoms as nothing to worry about and 46% of patients thought their own symptoms were nothing to worry about.

Pancreatic cancer is very difficult to diagnose and shockingly, [survival rates](#) haven't changed for over 40 years.

Ali Stunt, is a rare survivor of Britain's fifth deadliest cancer which kills on average 22 people a day. As founder of Pancreatic Cancer Action charity, Ali is determined to change the numbers and create greater awareness of the symptoms of this grim disease amongst both the general public and the medical community.

Ali Stunt explains, "Despite the grim statistics, many more people can survive [pancreatic cancer](#) but in order to do so they need to be diagnosed in time for surgery – currently the only potential for a cure. Those who are diagnosed in time have a chance of living beyond five years that is ten times greater than the overall average for the disease."

Currently, 90% of people with pancreatic cancer are diagnosed too late for surgery, with the average life expectancy on diagnosis a mere three to six months. Relative survival to five years is only 3%.

Pancreatic cancer has also been chronically underfunded for decades and currently receives only 1% of total cancer research funding.

Ali Stunt, continues, “Decades of limited funding has meant that research into pancreatic cancer lags behind other cancers but there are many dedicated researchers in Britain trying their best with meagre resources. However, even if a novel therapy were developed for pancreatic cancer in a laboratory today, it could take at least 10 to 15 years to reach the clinical environment and possibly longer to benefit patients.

In the meantime, the only way forward to change the survival numbers for pancreatic cancer (in the short term at least) is to focus on early diagnosis by increasing the levels of awareness and education in both the general population and medical communities – all with the aim that more people are diagnosed in time for surgery.

As one of the few lucky ones I am determined that more people will have the same lucky outcome as I have.”

Classic [pancreatic cancer symptoms](#) are persistent or significant abdominal pain and/or back pain, painless jaundice (yellow skin/eyes, dark urine), significant and unexplained weight loss. Other common symptoms are new onset diabetes not associated with weight gain, pain in the upper abdomen that typically radiates to the back, indigestion or abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite or nausea and vomiting, pain when eating and Steatorrhoea (fatty stools, often pale and smelly).

November is National Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month with a number of activities planned across the country.

Not many people have heard of pancreatic cancer and yet a number of well-known people have died from the disease including most recently Steve Jobs, head of Apple, Hollywood actor Patrick Swayze, Luciano Pavarotti, Gareth Hunt (New Avengers Actor), Magnus Magnusson (Broadcaster), Sir Nigel Hawthorne (actor), Bill Owen (“Compo” in Last of the Summer Wine), Joan Crawford (actress), Sir James Goldsmith (founder of The Referendum Party), Rex Harrison (actor) and Sir Alan Bates (actor).

[Pancreatic cancer affects men and women equally](#) and over a third of patients are under the age of 65. While the causes of pancreatic cancer are not fully understood, approximately 25% of cases are attributable to cigarette smoking, 5-10% are hereditary and it is thought that obesity, diabetes and excessive alcohol consumption increases the risk of contracting the disease.

## **ENDS**

Pancreatic Cancer Action has spokespeople available from the medical and research communities for interview or comment on all aspects of pancreatic cancer. We also have a number of patients willing to be case studies and/or give interviews.

For further media information, please contact

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For more information on pancreatic cancer, the awareness month and for a downloadable media briefing pack and statistics pack, please visit [www.pancreaticcanceraction.org/resources](http://www.pancreaticcanceraction.org/resources)