

Research shows alarming lack of understanding of bowel disease affecting 15,000 Irish people***GET GUTSY to help address lack of IBD awareness and understanding***

Dublin, Monday, 26th September 2011 The "Get Gutsy" public health awareness initiative was launched today by people with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), medical specialists from the Dept of Gastroenterology in St Vincent's University Hospital and healthcare company MSD following the findings of new research which shows that there is an alarming lack of understanding of IBD in Ireland and a need for more information for those people already diagnosed or suffering symptoms of this extremely debilitating illness.

Speaking at the launch of Get Gutsy was Tricia McArdle aged 28 years, originally from Galway who was diagnosed with IBD, the name for a group of disorders which cause inflammation of the intestine including Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, in 2005 at aged 22 years. She said, "When I was diagnosed I was desperate for information on IBD but none was available. I resorted to trawling through the internet where I could find nothing but horror stories of the illness. I felt incredibly alone and upset. I hope with the launch of Get Gutsy that those diagnosed with IBD realise that they have somewhere to turn for reliable information and advice on how to manage your IBD and live a reasonably healthy life."

The Get Gutsy website (www.getgutsy.ie), smartphone application and information literature provides essential information to people who may be suffering from symptoms associated with IBD and to those who may already be diagnosed with IBD such as a useful symptom tracker which will help them manage the illness and track symptoms to discuss with their healthcare provider.

An estimated 15,000 Irish people suffer from IBD, with the vast majority diagnosed when they are between the ages of 15 and 30 years.

Speaking at the launch Professor Hugh Mulcahy, Consultant Gastroenterologist, St Vincent's University Hospital commented, "IBD is very prevalent for a disease which strikes people at such a young age and which is so debilitating. However, treatments are constantly improving so if someone is concerned about changes in bowel habits, nausea and unexplained weight loss, they should visit their GP as soon as possible."

Prof Mulcahy added, "Get Gutsy is providing a resource that is badly needed by IBD patients. Research amongst IBD patients carried out by St Vincent's University Hospital in June 2011 shows that 55% of IBD patients are seeking information about their disease online; 76% would like an Irish IBD website and 80% would use a symptom tracker.²"

The cause of IBD is unknown and the disease is not preventable however as a result of advances in treatment, many patients will go through long and sustained symptom free periods even though IBD is still a chronic condition.

The research published today showed that 60% of the population mistakenly believe that IBD is preventable, curable and not that prevalent in Ireland.¹

The research also showed that 52% of those surveyed could not name any symptoms for IBD, which can include abdominal pain, a change in bowel habits urgent and /or bloody diarrhoea, constipation, weight loss, extreme tiredness, nausea and fever.¹ People who may be suffering from these symptoms or who are already diagnosed with IBD can visit the new Get Gutsy website on www.getgutsy.ie for information and advice. Those diagnosed with IBD can also download a smartphone app from the website. The App will enable people with IBD to track their symptoms, plan their medication and medical appointments. Get Gusty also includes a suite of literature on IBD which is available to download from www.getgutsy.ie or from gastroenterology units across Ireland.

ENDS

For more information, interviews or images, please contact:

Caitriona Hennessy, Corporate Reputations, 01 661 8915, 087 933 5686,
Caitriona@corporatereputations.ie

Notes to the Editor:

About Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is a name for a group of disorders which cause inflammation of the intestine. It includes both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis (UC) which are very similar but affect different parts of the digestive tract. UC affects the inner lining of the large intestine while Crohn's disease can affect any part of the digestive tract from the mouth to the anus. **Symptoms of IBD can include;** abdominal pain, a change in bowel habits, urgent and/or bloody diarrhoea, constipation, weight loss, extreme tiredness, nausea and fever. Living with IBD can be a real challenge, but symptoms can be managed with a combination of care, medication, hospitalisation and sometimes surgery.

What is the difference between IBD and IBS?

IBD is not the same as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). Though some of the symptoms of IBD and IBS are similar, the two conditions are not the same as IBS does not cause inflammation of the gut. People with IBD suffer more severe conditions and are at risk of becoming nutrient deficient because of the intestine's inability to absorb nutrients.

About the research

¹The research was conducted by RedC in August 2011. 1,011 interviews were conducted by phone using a random digit dial sample.

² The research was carried by St Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, on 'Current and future education for IBD patients'. It was an anonymous self administered questionnaire of 180 IBD patients. The data was collected from June-July 2011.

About MSD

Today's MSD is a global healthcare leader working to help the world be well. MSD is known as Merck in the United States and Canada and MSD elsewhere. Through our prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies, and consumer care and animal health products, we work with customers and operate in more than 140 countries to deliver innovative health solutions. We also demonstrate our commitment to increasing access to healthcare through far-reaching policies, programs and partnerships. For more information, visit www.msd.ie.

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In the last five decades the company has invested over €2.2bn in Ireland. MSD is one of Ireland's leading exporters and contributes significantly towards making the pharmaceutical industry the country's leading export sector. MSD is a member of Guaranteed Irish and manufactures or packages many of its leading products for the world market in Ireland.