

News Release – For Immediate Release

It's time to Know Your Nodes

Learn about lymphoma with a fun new quiz

Monday 10 September 2007 - It's been dubbed 'the cancer that no-one knows' and it occurs in a part of the body that remains a mystery to most New Zealanders.

But with the number of people diagnosed with lymphoma each year more than doubling in the last decade...a trend which is forecast to continue over the coming years¹....it is increasingly important that people learn more about this blood cancer.

To mark World Lymphoma Awareness Day on September 15, the Leukaemia & Blood Foundation (LBF) has launched a new easy and fun way to unravel the mysteries of your lymphatic system.

Simply visit www.knowyournodes.org.nz to take part in a quiz and find out what you know - or more importantly don't know - about one of the body's most vital systems.

Pru Etcheverry, Executive Director of the Leukaemia & Blood Foundation, said: "In 2000 there were 600 people registered with lymphoma. In 2005 that figure sat at 777² - that's a 30% rise.

"It has a considerably higher incidence than cervical cancer in New Zealand, yet few people have heard of it.

"New Zealanders really need to know their nodes - both the lymphatic system and the signs and symptoms of lymphoma. If detected early, there is a better chance for quicker diagnosis, treatment and overall survival."

She added: "Access to reliable and accurate information through the LBF is extremely important for patients. We also provide emotional support through our patient support co-ordinators, who help them and their families deal with their illness and treatment, as well as the sometimes long transition back to a normal life."

An early diagnosis is important because, if untreated, some types of lymphoma can be fatal within as little as six months.

But according to a global survey conducted by the Lymphoma Coalition, a non-profit network of international lymphoma patient groups, over half (55%) of people living with lymphoma had never heard of this cancer before they were diagnosed. Similarly, almost half (43%) of patients did not understand, or only partially understood, what they were told by their doctors upon diagnosis.

These results were borne out by research conducted by the Leukaemia & Blood Foundation, which revealed that only 9% of 500 New Zealanders surveyed could name lymphoma as a type of cancer, while less than 1% considered lymphoma as a possible cause of the most common symptoms³.

Those common symptoms are often misdiagnosed as flu or fatigue and include the following:

- Painless swelling in the upper body lymph nodes, which can be felt in places like your neck, collarbone region, armpits or groin
- Fevers, especially at night
- Chills or temperature swings
- Unexplained weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Unusual tiredness or lack of energy
- Persistent coughing
- Breathlessness
- Persistent itch all over the body without an apparent cause or rash
- Enlarged tonsils
- Headache

Most people who have complaints like these will not have lymphoma. However, according to the LBF's Medical Director, Dr Peter Browett, anyone experiencing these symptoms over a period of more than two weeks, should visit a medical professional and have them checked out.

He added: "Early diagnosis makes a huge difference in the ability to combat the disease. Most patients are distressed when they find out they have lymphoma and are understandably frightened as they often don't know what it is. In many cases, patients don't realise how effective treatment is and how good the outlook can be."

1. Ministry of Health 2002, Cancer in New Zealand. Trends and Predictions: A Summary
2. The New Zealand Health Information Service: Cancer Registrations 2002, and 2005 (2005 is provisional data only)
3. Research Solutions: Lymphoma Awareness Research August 2005 – data on file

Factfile

- The lymphatic system - a network of tissue, ducts and organs - is an important part of the immune system, playing a major role in the body's defence against infection
- Lymphoma develops when an error occurs in the production of lymphocytes, a type of white blood cell found in the lymph nodes, resulting in abnormal cells that become cancerous
- There are more than 35 types of lymphoma, which fall under the categories Hodgkin and non-Hodgkin
- Lymphoma, which can occur at any age, is most common in people 50 years and over, although there appears to be a rise in 15 to 24-year-olds being diagnosed
- Around 750 people will be diagnosed with lymphoma in New Zealand this year – around 80 will develop Hodgkin and around 670 will develop non-Hodgkin
- It is the sixth most common cancer in New Zealand
- The Leukaemia & Blood Foundation (LBF), a national charity, is New Zealand's leading resource of information for patients and families living with lymphoma. You can contact the LBF on 0800 15 10 15 or visit www.leukaemia.org.nz

About the Leukaemia & Blood Foundation

Six people every day are diagnosed with leukaemia, lymphoma, myeloma or a related condition. The Leukaemia & Blood Foundation, New Zealand's organisation dedicated to the support of patients and families with these diseases, relies entirely on money raised through fundraising events including Shave for a Cure[®], Lunch for Leukaemia and 100 Hole Golf Marrowthon[®], as well as public donations, sponsorships and grants. The need for these services is constantly growing. In the past year alone, new patient referrals to the LBF have increased by 34% and our Support Coordinators currently respond to approximately 700 contacts from patients and families per month. Individualised patient support programmes include educational booklets, support groups, counselling and financial support. The Foundation also funds research and provides education and patient advocacy.

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