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PRESS RELEASE

World Diabetes Day 2003

Type 1 diabetes in children – same diagnosis, different prognosis

London, United Kingdom. 5 November 2003 – The **International Insulin Foundation** (IIF) would like to draw attention to the plight of people, especially children, in the developing world with insulin requiring diabetes.

November 14th 2003 marks the fourteenth annual World Diabetes Day. Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects people of all ages in all areas of the world. Inadequate care can lead to serious health complications such as blindness, kidney failure, neuropathy (degeneration of nerves and nervous system), amputation, heart attacks and death.

Type 1 diabetes is caused by a process which destroys insulin producing cells in the pancreas. Insulin is vital for the survival of patients suffering from Type 1 diabetes and must be administered daily throughout the life of the patient by injection. The International Diabetes Federation estimates that there are 5.3 million people world-wide who suffer from Type 1 diabetes, and thus require insulin every day.

The first patient to be treated with insulin was a Canadian child by the name of Leonard Thompson in 1922. Over 80 years after the first patient received this life saving treatment many people with diabetes in the developing world still have difficulties accessing insulin. This leads to a life expectancy which can be as low as 12 months for a child in rural sub-Saharan Africa compared to over 50-60 years for a child in Europe.

The stories below highlight the contrasting challenges that two children face:

My name is **Mary** and I live in the capital city of Zambia. I am 15 years old now. When I was 11 years old, I was admitted to a local health centre and was diagnosed as having malaria. After a few days I wasn't getting any better so I was sent to the main teaching hospital. After a long time there a doctor diagnosed diabetes.

My family has an income of about £91 per month. Sometimes my family need to spend as much as £42 if I have to go into hospital.

I now attend a free diabetes clinic held once a week at the main teaching hospital. I tend to go about once a month for a check up and to get my insulin. They also test my blood sugar, as I do not have a machine or testing strips at home as these are too expensive. When I go I need to miss school as the clinic takes place during school hours and it takes me over an hour to get there. I need to take a bus there. It costs about £1.00 to get from my home to the clinic and back. Sometimes when money is a problem I can't go to the clinic. But I am lucky living in the capital. If I lived in the rural areas I might have to travel up to 100km to a hospital and I would not be able to afford this more than once a year. And I know that these hospitals are often out of insulin.

I was able to attend a Youth Camp organised by the Diabetes Association in my country. I learnt a lot about my disease, how to inject myself, the foods I should and shouldn't eat. And also had a chance to meet other children with the same condition as me.

I am lucky to get my insulin for free at the pharmacy, but sometimes it is out of stock so then I have to buy it at a private pharmacy and this can cost as much as £12 for a bottle – which lasts about a month. The hospital pharmacy hardly ever has any special insulin syringes so if I am lucky I get them free from nurses and doctors working in the intensive care unit. Most of the time though I have to pay £1.40 for a month's supply of syringes. Even though these are meant to be used just once, I use them for a week or two depending on how much money my family has. My family does not have a fridge so my insulin is kept in a clay pot with water under my bed.

The hardest part of my treatment is injecting myself every day and not being able to enjoy the same foods as my family and friends. I worry if we don't have enough money for insulin. We are 8 at home and a lot of money is spent on my care and they also worry about me too much.

My name is **Tom** and I am 14. I have had diabetes for 2 years now and live on the outskirts of London. My GP referred me to the Hospital after I was found to be drinking a lot, passing a lot of urine and losing weight. He did a blood test in the surgery and it was then that I found out I had diabetes.

Every 3 months I attend a consultation with a diabetes specialist nurse and we go through any problems I have. If ever I have any problems I can phone her and get an appointment or she can sort things out on the phone. The nurse has also spoken to my teacher and the school nurse so they understand my diabetes and what I need at school. I am lucky as the NHS provides all my care for free and the Hospital is just a bus ride away or my Mum takes me there by car.

Last year I went to the Diabetes Care camp and had a great time doing lots of adventure stuff with other kids with diabetes. I really learnt how to monitor my blood and change my insulin.

I get my insulin and pen for injections for free. I also have a machine for testing my blood sugar so I can change the amount of insulin I need if I have a big meal or do sports.

Besides remembering to do regular blood tests, not being able to eat all the foods I like all the time and that my mum worries about me too much, I lead a normal life.

About the IIF:

The IIF is a UK Registered Charity (Registered Charity No. 10999032), established by leading academics and physicians in the field of diabetes with the aim of prolonging the life and promoting the health of people with diabetes in developing countries by improving the supply of insulin and education in its use.

To achieve this the Foundation has carried out fieldwork in both Mozambique and Zambia, where it is currently collaborating with the national diabetes associations and governments to improve the conditions faced by people with diabetes.

If you would like to discuss the opportunity of interviewing a child with type 1 diabetes in Zambia and in the UK, or for more information, please contact:

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