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PRESS RELEASE

World Diabetes Day 2004

Tackling the problem of Type 1 diabetes in developing countries – access to insulin and care in the year 2004 in Africa

London, United Kingdom. 5 November 2004 – 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. The Foundation's work has shown that it is possible to improve services for patients with this disease so that treatment for survival is possible, even in the world's poorest countries.

IIF's statement for World Diabetes Day 2004

The official theme of World Diabetes Day 2004 is obesity. Obesity and its health impacts, one of which is Type 2 diabetes, is extremely worrying. The increase in the number of children developing a disease that was once referred to as "adult onset diabetes" should be addressed vigorously at national and international levels.

The IIF would like for people to reflect on this day that in developed countries, a new public health challenge is presenting itself in the form of children developing Type 2 diabetes. However, in developing countries an "old" health problem is still causing unnecessary suffering and death to thousands of people.

The IIF's accomplishments

The IIF has carried out two in-country assessments in Mozambique and Zambia and is planning to finish its third assessment in Mali to coincide with World Diabetes Day 2004. The IIF will then use these assessments to write a report on the state of diabetes care in sub-Saharan Africa in an effort to try to influence policy makers to address this issue.

To date the IIF has found that insulin many factors impact the proper access to care for patients in developing countries.

These are:

- Problems with supplies (insulin, syringes, testing materials, etc.)
 - Cost of treatment (direct: cost of insulin and supplies, consultations, laboratory tests, etc. indirect: travel costs, lost time from work or school, etc.)
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- Lack of infrastructure within health facilities especially with regards to diagnosis
- Lack of appropriate training with regards to treating patients with diabetes
- Importance of traditional beliefs

This situation combined with health systems overburdened with HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria leads to extremely low life expectancies for people, especially children, with Type 1 diabetes in developing countries. The impact on life expectancy is even higher in rural areas than in urban areas due to difficulties accessing health facilities in rural areas.

Most importantly, it is possible for improvements to occur. Just one year after the IIF's report to the Ministry of Health and the Mozambique Diabetes Association in 2003, a repeat visit by the Foundation's Project Coordinator showed dramatic improvements in care, with a much higher level of attention being accorded to this condition across the country.

Type 1 diabetes

Type 1 diabetes is caused by the destruction of 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.

November 14th 2004 marks the fifteenth 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. November 14th was chosen as World Diabetes Day as it is Frederick Banting's birthday. Together with Charles Best, Dr. Banting discovered insulin in October 1921.

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 diagnosed in Europe.

The establishment of the International Insulin Foundation, by leading academics and physicians in the field of diabetes, as a concerted effort to improve the prospects for Type 1 diabetic patients in the world's poorest countries. The IIF was established 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.

In order to achieve these objectives, a clear analysis of the constraints to insulin access and diabetes care is needed. The IIF's view is that increasing the supply of insulin through donations or other means is not sustainable and that the root of the problem is what needs to be solved. This led the IIF to carry out in-depth country assessments in Mozambique and Zambia.

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