



Embargoed until 00:01, 26 March 2008

SLEEP APNOEA SUFFERERS WAKE UP TO GOOD NEWS FROM NICE

Treatment for UK's sleep sufferers is finally available to all

London, Wednesday 26 March 2008 – The British Thoracic Society (BTS) has welcomed today's decision by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) to approve CPAP, a treatment for sleep apnoea that will improve the lives of thousands of sufferers and could, over 5 years, save 400 lives and £400 million by reducing road accidents.¹

People with sleep apnoea have been shown to be 7-12 times more likely to have a road accident than those without the disorder.^{2,3} In simulated driving people with sleepiness due to sleep apnoea perform worse than drivers with blood alcohol levels in excess of the legal limit.⁴ More than 300 people a year are killed, and many more are seriously injured, as a result of drivers falling asleep at the wheel.⁵ Death tolls from sleep-related accidents are three times higher than other accidents.⁶

In addition to the immediate danger to individuals and other road users through falling asleep at the wheel, sleep apnoea is a contributory factor in the development of hypertension, heart disease and stroke.

Sleep apnoea is caused by closure of the upper airway during sleep. The obstruction interrupts breathing, preventing air from entering the lungs and forcing the person to wake briefly before falling back to sleep again. This can occur hundreds of times a night without the sufferer realising, leading to poor sleep quality and severe sleepiness during the day. Symptoms of sleep apnoea include heavy snoring, daytime sleepiness and poor concentration.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) is a simple treatment delivered via a face mask attached to a small pump which generates a flow of air. By blowing this into the nose and/or mouth during sleep the airway in the throat is kept fully open.

Regular CPAP treatment has been clinically proven to restore normal daytime alertness, thereby improving quality of life, social functioning and work and driving performance. It reduces road traffic accidents in people suffering from sleep apnoea by up to 83% and reduces blood pressure to an extent that cardiac risk may decrease by 20% and stroke risk by 40% over five to ten years.^{7,2}

NICE has today announced that CPAP should be available via the NHS as treatment for adults with moderate or severe symptomatic obstructive sleep apnoea/hypopnoea syndrome (OSAHS) – known as sleep apnoea. More than half a million people suffer from sleep apnoea in the UK – up to one in 25 middle-aged men and one in 50 middle-aged women– but so far less than one in four have been diagnosed.^{7,1}

Professor John Gibson, Chair of the Sleep Apnoea Group of the British Thoracic Society said: “This is excellent news for people suffering from sleep apnoea and for society as a whole. Previously only half of those diagnosed with the condition in the UK have been able to access clinically proven treatment for the condition. This decision will not only improve the quality of life of people with sleep apnoea but also should reduce road traffic accidents caused by excessive sleepiness.”

Frank Govan, of The Sleep Apnoea Trust Association (SATA) commented: “Sleep disorders remain among the most under-diagnosed and under-treated of medical conditions. In one study sufferers had waited on average 8 years before seeking help from their GP. Society as a whole is guilty of playing down the importance of sleep disorders, and trivialising excessive sleepiness.”

Before starting treatment accurate clinical diagnosis is essential. Both investigation and treatment require health professionals with experience in this area and the BTS has produced a service specification for health commissioners and providers setting standards of care for people with sleep apnoea, endorsed by the General Practice Airways Group and SATA. With as many as a quarter of a million sufferers still unrecognised, BTS members around England have distributed this service specification to their local PCTs to ensure that the NICE recommendations are translated into the necessary action.

A simple questionnaire that people can complete to establish whether they have abnormal daytime sleepiness and therefore might be suffering from sleep apnoea is available on the BTS website: www.brit-thoracic.org.uk - ENDS

For more information please call Jon Pike or James Hollaway on 020 7815 3900 or email jon.pike@munroforster.com or james.hollaway@munroforster.com

Notes to editors:

- The British Thoracic Society is the UK's professional body of respiratory specialist doctors, nurses and other health professionals (www.brit-thoracic.org.uk)

References:

1. Estimates based on data published by Douglas NJ, Thorax 2002; 57 and Kapur V. Journal of Sleep 1999; 22. Presented at BTS Summer Meeting 2003 by MacKay T.
2. Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN). Management of Obstructive Sleep Apnoea/ Hypopnoea Syndrome in Adults. 2003
3. Findley LJ, Unverzagt ME, Suratt PM et al. Automobile Accidents. Involving Patients with Obstructive Sleep Apnoea. Am Rev Respir Dis 1988; 138 337-340.
4. George CF, Boudreau AC, Smiley A. Simulated driving performance in patients with obstructive sleep apnoea. Am J Respir Crit Care Med. 1996; 154(1): 175-81
5. www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk. Tiredness kills – how to avoid driver tiredness. June 2004.
6. Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA). Driver Fatigue and Road Accident: A Literature Review and Position Paper. February 2001
7. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). Guidance on sleep apnoea and continuous positive airways pressure (CPAP). March 2008.