

### Media statement

28 May 2019

#### The invisible symptoms and unseen impacts of MS

**Multiple Sclerosis (MS)** is a chronic disease that attacks the central nervous system (the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves), there are over 25,600 people living with MS in Australia and 3,970 Queenslanders living with the disease.

On **World MS Day (30 May)** Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) Neurologist, Dr Antony Winkel, is hoping to raise awareness of the invisible symptoms of MS and challenge common misconceptions about the disease.

“The day is an important opportunity to give people the facts about MS. At SCHHS we encounter patients in our clinics every day who are worried about MS. Every single one of them may experience different symptoms at different times and the impact of these symptoms can vary,” Dr Winkel said.

“Depending on where MS lesions develop on the brain and spinal cord, it can manifest in different ways. Unfortunately, everyone’s disease is different, which can be tough for patients trying to work out what the future holds for them.

“The other challenge for sufferers is that symptoms of MS can be both visible and invisible to others. Common symptoms may include motor control issues such as muscular spasms and problems with weakness, coordination, balance and functioning of the arms and legs,” he said.

“Other MS symptoms are invisible, such as fatigue, heat intolerance, memory loss and depression. People associated with someone with MS need to keep in mind that how someone looks is not an indication of the symptoms they may be experiencing or how they are coping with these symptoms.”

At this stage MS is not curable. It’s a lifelong disease, however doctors and scientists are making discoveries about the treatment and management of MS every day. Research has brought many life-changing treatments that can control or slow down MS, and the outlook for someone with a new diagnosis of MS is increasingly good with modern therapies.

#### LINDA’S STORY

Buderim resident Linda Hawkes was 44 years old when she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis after decades of numerous and varied symptoms of the disease.

“It was definitely life-changing, but it was also a relief, for so many years I’d been pigeon holed as neurotic, to finally have a label for my disease meant I could move forward because I knew what I was dealing with,” Linda said.

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"I have relapse remitting MS, so in the 17 years since I was diagnosed I've had many relapses, I've lost mobility and had to learn how to walk again six times. But these days there's so much more known about the disease and medication has increased in leaps and bounds.

Linda said the team around her are vital in her managing her MS.

"I'm very fortunate to have a fantastic neurologist in Dr Winkel. He took me on as a patient last year and reviewed me with fresh eyes, and he's given me hope for my future.

"Dawn Harwood, who is the Neurology Clinical Nurse Consultant and my MS infusion liaison, is also a critical part of my care. She's my go-to person, sorting out even the smallest details. Her support gives me so much piece-of-mind.

She said: "I also wouldn't be where I am today without the support of MS Queensland.

"I now have infusion at the hospital every six months, and I haven't relapsed in 15 months. With the support of Dr Winkel, his team and my G.P, Dr Roger Faint, I'm able to manage this insidious, unpredictable and often invisible disease," Linda said.

#### ENDS

#### MEDIA OPPORTUNITY

Interview and photo opportunities with Dr Winkel and Linda Hawkes are available.

WHEN: Thursday 30 May at 10am

WHERE: Sunshine Coast University Hospital, meet at Main Reception.

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