

Launch of Guidelines for the Assessment and Management of Patients with Sleep Disorders by the Irish Sleep Society

Monday February 1, 2010

Royal College of Physicians, Kildare Street, Dublin 2.

The recently completed “Guidelines for the Assessment and Management of Patients with Sleep Disorders” were launched by the Minister for Health and Children, Ms. Mary Harney TD, on Monday February 1, 2010 in the Royal College of Physicians, Kildare Street, Dublin.

Approximately 80 invited guests were in attendance with representation from the Department of Health and Children, Hospitals, Sleep Laboratories, and Clinical Specialists in sleep disorders. Other interested stakeholders such as the Road Safety Authority were also represented and representatives from television, radio and print media were also present.

The President of the Irish Sleep Society, Prof. Walter McNicholas from St. Vincent’s University Hospital introduced the event and gave an overview of sleep disorders with a particular emphasis on obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA), which represents the most frequent sleep disorders treated in Irish sleep clinics. He emphasised that sleep disorders affect most people at some stage in life. Disorders such as OSA affect up to 100,000 people in Ireland and represent an important factor in premature deaths from heart disease and stroke. Furthermore, the daytime sleepiness associated with OSA is a major contributing factor to road traffic accidents. Yet, the condition is treatable by continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP).

Prof. McNicholas stressed that the objective of the guidelines is to facilitate the development of sleep disorders’ investigation and treatment facilities in accordance with best practice standards, and the initiative has been strongly supported by patient support groups such as the Irish Sleep Apnoea Trust (ISAT). The implementation of the guidelines represents an important component of a National Strategy for sleep disorders.

Mr. Dan Smyth of ISAT spoke next and strongly endorsed the guidelines on behalf of his association. He commented on the inadequate clinical and funding resources provided to Irish patients with sleep disorders, particularly those with OSA. While ISAT has about 2,500 members, the great majority of Irish OSA patients remain undiagnosed.

The Minister then addressed the group and complimented the Society on the quality and professional appearance of the Guidelines document. In launching the guidelines, she commented that the document was presented in a user-friendly and easily readable format. She also expressed the hope that the guidelines would be made available to the widest possible readership, including general practitioners, other healthcare professionals, and the general public. Minister Harney also expressed support for the need to diagnose and treat patients with sleep disorders.

In closing the formal part of the meeting, Prof. McNicholas indicated that the guidelines document would be made available on the Society website (www.irishsleepsociety.org).

In informal discussions after these presentations, Minister Harney indicated to ISS members that OSA might be a suitable disorder to have assessed by the National Director of Clinical Care at the HSE, Dr. Barry White, in the context of developing a National Strategy.