



22 June 2009

MEDIA RELEASE

More support needed for workers with Crohn's disease and colitis - survey

Almost one third of people with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis feel unsupported in their workplace, Crohn's & Colitis Australia (CCA) said today.

Employees diagnosed with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis - two debilitating conditions that can cause severe diarrhoea, abdominal pain, weight loss and fatigue - reported an ongoing lack of understanding among their co-workers after disclosing their illness, a national survey has found.

The results have prompted CCA to launch two briefing kits to promote a more flexible working environment for employees with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, collectively known as Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD). Their release coincides with the start of National Crohn's & Colitis Awareness Week from 22 to 28 June.

The two guides - *Working with IBD: A Guide for Employers* and *Working with IBD: A Guide for Employees* - help to break down barriers in the workplace by promoting a better understanding of Crohn's and colitis and the legal rights and obligations of each party. The guides cover issues such as managing sick leave, discrimination, duty of disclosure, possible adjustments in the workplace to accommodate workers, and support that is available to employers and employees.

More than 61,000 Australians have Crohn's disease and colitis, a number expected to rise by 23 per cent in the next decade. The conditions are typically diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 35, and cost the nation \$2.7 billion every year according to Access Economics.

CCA Chief Executive Officer Francesca Manglaviti said: "These new guides are a vital step in providing greater certainty for employers and employees when it comes to dealing with chronic illnesses in the workplace such as Crohn's and colitis.

“Given many people are diagnosed with these illnesses in the prime of their working life, it is important they have the same opportunities as others to achieve their potential and enjoy long and successful careers.”

The survey, conducted by StollzNow Research for CCA and completed by 966 people living with the conditions, also found 28 per cent of people felt uncomfortable discussing their condition with others, with more than half of them electing not to disclose their condition due to embarrassment and fear of a lack of understanding from colleagues and management.

Ms Manglaviti said the guides aimed to “destigmatise” the illnesses and promote a more productive and positive working environment.

“Many of our members have said that they feel embarrassed about telling people they have a bowel condition. We need to get to a stage where people feel comfortable in talking about these conditions to breakdown the barriers in workplaces and the community,” she said.

“The majority of people who do disclose their condition to co-workers and employers report extremely positive outcomes, including support from colleagues and employers and the ability to negotiate more flexible working hours. They also no longer have to live with the stress of trying to hide their symptoms.

“We genuinely believe employers want to do the right thing and help people with Crohn’s and colitis and these information guides are designed to support people in the workplace.

“People living with Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis deserve to be treated in the same manner as others in the workplace,” Ms Manglaviti said.

Other survey findings included:

- 12 per cent had been discriminated against in the workplace;
- 20 per cent were forced to change their job due to their condition;
- 67 per cent were prevented from taking a job or seeking out a particular area of work; and
- 55 per cent have taken less than five days leave due to illness.

To further promote IBD in the workplace, CCA today also launched a nation-wide competition, **Live the Dream**, for people with Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis. The competition offers people with IBD the opportunity to win one of three dream job experiences — spending a week working with either Australia Zoo, The Australian Ballet or behind the scenes with SBS.

People wishing to enter should visit www.livethedreamcompetition.com.au to view the competition terms and conditions and submit their entry on why they should win a dream job for the week.

Crohn's & Colitis Australia is a national charity offering help and advice to people living with Crohn's and colitis and has been helping people for more than 24 years. It provides education, advocacy and support programs, and funding for research.

For more information about the National Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Week, please visit www.crohnsandcolitis.com.au or contact the CCA office on 1800 138 029.

The *Working with IBD* survey was prepared by StollzNow Research. The *Live the Dream* competition and *Working with IBD* resources are a part of an education and awareness initiative developed by Crohn's & Colitis Australia, with support from healthcare company Abbott.

ENDS

For interviews contact:

Francesca Manglaviti, Chief Executive Officer, 03 9815 1266 or 0400 225 207

Alison McClelland, Communications Manager, 03 9815 1266