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MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL MIDNIGHT MAY 15

Australia takes global lead to launch first World IBD Day

As an events manager, it was Amber Yates' job to make others the star of the show. But now the spotlight is fixed on the 37-year-old as the face of Australia's first World IBD Day campaign.

In a world first, 27 countries across four continents (Australia, North America, South America and Europe) have joined forces to provide a global voice for the 5 million people living with the debilitating bowel conditions Crohn's and colitis, collectively known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

The disease, typically diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 35, affects the digestive system and causes intestinal tissue to become inflamed, form sores and bleed easily. There is no cure, no known cause, and little public understanding of the pain and chronic suffering which IBD patients cope with every day of their lives.

Amber, who was diagnosed with Crohn's disease when she was 13 years old, hopes World IBD Day on Wednesday, May 19, will increase recognition of the illness and patients' need for community support.

"I agreed to put my face to this campaign because people need to understand that this disease does not discriminate – it can happen to anyone at any time," she said. "Unfortunately, few people know about IBD because, unlike some other illnesses, it doesn't garner the support of high-profile names. I am not famous, but I still need recognition, support and understanding."

Amber said the symptoms of the disease often forced people to abandon their chosen career, leading to a sense of isolation. She left her high-pressured job as an events manager three years ago and has since started a home-based business, Love, AJ, producing hand-crafted decorative artworks.

"An event such as World IBD Day makes you realise that you are not alone. This is something shared by millions of people," Amber said.

Crohn's & Colitis Australia (CCA) is one of six global patient groups hosting World IBD Day, which coincides with the national charity's National Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Week (May 16-22).

CCA Chief Executive Officer Francesca Manglaviti said highlighting the condition at an international level was an important step in putting IBD on the world map.

"For too long these conditions have been largely ignored by the community and by successive governments," Ms Manglaviti said.

"We know that IBD affects people of all ages with different backgrounds and from various communities. This disease does not stop at national borders, and as such, it needs to be tackled on a global basis. Joining forces with our international counterparts is the best way to confront and conquer IBD for future generations, irrespective of where they live."

More than 61,000 Australians live with IBD, a number predicted to jump by 23 per cent by 2020. Common symptoms include the frequent and urgent need to use the toilet, diarrhoea, loss of

appetite, fatigue and weight loss. As most people are diagnosed in the prime of their life, the illness can cause delayed physical development, and lengthy absences from school and workplaces.

“Until we find a cure, there needs to be a greater focus on supporting people to successfully manage their disease, with more funds directed to research to improve treatments, and hopefully, one day, find a cure,” Ms Manglaviti said.

She said people could show their support by going to the charity’s website and signing the organisation’s declaration of patients’ rights, which outlines the basic needs and entitlements of people living with IBD. CCA is aiming for 10,000 signatures.

“It would give all of our members, and the families and friends who support them, such a boost to show that the wider community cares for their wellbeing,” she said.

ENDS

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www.worldibdday.org

About IBD

- About 61,000 Australians have Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis (collectively known as inflammatory bowel disease).
- The number of people with IBD is expected to increase by 23 per cent by 2020.
- IBD is commonly diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 35 years, and can cause significant disability and lengthy absences from school and workplaces.
- IBD costs the nation \$2.7 billion every year, and is more prevalent than epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis.
- Typical symptoms include the frequent and urgent need to use the toilet, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, fatigue and weight loss.

About Crohn’s & Colitis Australia™ (CCA)

- CCA is the peak body representing people with Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis in Australia.
- CCA’s mission is to support the Crohn’s and colitis community with a focus on confidential support programs, including education, advocacy, counselling, increasing awareness and generating and utilising funds for research and programs.
- CCA’s Helpline receives more than 1000 calls a year.
- More than 2000 people attend CCA’s information forums, symposiums and camps around Australia every year.
- CCA is a registered not-for-profit national organisation funded entirely through membership fees, donations and fundraising activities.
- For more information visit www.crohnsandcolitis.com.au or phone 1800 138 029.