



Motor Neurone Disease - Some Background

- Motor neurone disease is the name given to a group of diseases in which damage to motor neurones occurs. Motor neurones are nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord that control movement of voluntary muscles, that is, muscles that are under conscious control. These include all the muscles of the trunk and limbs, speech, swallowing and breathing.
- With no nerves to activate them, muscles gradually weaken and waste, and paralysis ensues. Weakness is often seen first in the hands or feet, or the first sign may be swallowing difficulty or slurred speech. Muscle twitching and/or cramps also occur. In the majority of cases the senses, intellect and memory are not affected, but approximately sixty percent may present with a mild form of fronto-temporal dementia.
- MND affects each person differently in respect of initial symptoms, rate and pattern of progression, and survival time; there are no remissions. Average survival time after diagnosis is three to five years, but for approximately one third of people, survival after diagnosis is less than one year. On average, one person dies every day of MND in Australia.
- Progression of MND can be rapid, creating high levels of disability and consequent needs for support. Support needs include assistance with feeding, communication, movement, transferring and toileting. MND has a comprehensive and increasing impact on all activities of daily living, leading to generalised paralysis, loss of speech and swallowing difficulty and ultimately death.
- The cause of MND is not known, except that in a small percentage of cases it is hereditary. It is not contagious. There is currently no treatment or cure available for MND.
- Rilutek, a drug developed by Aventis Pharma, was demonstrated in trials to extend life expectancy by six to twelve months, and has been registered in Australia. It has been included on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme effective from 1 July 2003.
- MND occurs in all countries of the world, usually in people over the age of forty, but there have been many cases of younger people being affected.
 - Incidence is 2 per 100,000 of population per year.
 - Prevalence is around 6 per 100,000 of population.
 - It affects nearly 1,300 Australians at any time, (about 250 in Victoria).
 - Peak ages of onset are the fifties and sixties.
 - Men are affected slightly more often than women.

MND Victoria

Registered Association No. A7518 ABN 44-113-484-160
265 Canterbury Road (PO Box 23) Canterbury 3126
Tel: (03) 9830 2122 Freecall:1800 806 632 Fax: (03) 9830 2228
Internet: www.mnd.asn.au Email: info@mnd.asn.au