

## MEDIA RELEASE – 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018

### **IRELAND HAS A SILENT EPIDEMIC - NON-ALCOHOLIC FATTY LIVER DISEASE (NAFLD) WHICH MAY BE EXTREMELY PREVALENT IN THE TYPE 2 DIABETES COMMUNITY.**

### ***A recent Irish liver screening initiative supports the International Clinical Guideline recommendations that all people with type 2 diabetes should be screened for Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease***

There is a silent epidemic of Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) in Ireland. People with type 2 diabetes, obesity and/or high cholesterol are at greater risk of developing this disease, which, if left undiagnosed and untreated, may lead to cirrhosis of the liver. However, awareness among patients and healthcare providers in this country is extremely low leading to underdiagnoses, under-treatment and increased mortality.

To highlight the serious risk that NAFLD poses for people with type 2 diabetes and to raise the much needed awareness within the diabetes community in Ireland, Ireland's first "Diabetes Liver Screen Initiative" was held in November 2017. This was a collaborative-led initiative between Diabetes Ireland and Professor Suzanne Norris (St James's Hospital and Liver Wellness®).

Members of Diabetes Ireland with type 2 diabetes were invited to participate in this screening initiative which included the innovative FibroScan® technology, a 10-minute/non-invasive/pain-free FibroScan® test. Liver Health Screening took place during World Diabetes Week in November 2017. Each participant received their result on the day of their scan and a consultant report with recommendations (where necessary) was sent to each person and their GP/consultant so that appropriate treatment could commence immediately.

Following completion of the screening initiative and review of clinical outcomes, Professor Norris will speak on "NAFLD and Diabetes" at the Diabetes Ireland DICE conference in Croke Park on Friday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February. At this meeting, Professor Norris will announce the significant outcomes of the screening initiative, outcomes which support the implementation of International Clinical Practice Guidelines recommendations into Irish clinical practice: *"in patients with type 2 diabetes, the presence of NAFLD should be looked for irrespective of liver enzyme blood tests, since type 2 diabetes patients are at high risk of liver disease progression"*. **Please see the Infographic below which illustrates the results of the Irish Liver Screening Initiative.**

*Dr Anna Clarke, Health Promotion Manager – "Diabetes Ireland were delighted to offer this service to our members but more importantly the startling results on this small cohort of people indicate the need to extend this to become part of routine screening similar to the eye (retinascreen) and foot assessment that is an essential part of the annual review. NAFLD is not something that is routinely checked in Type 2 diabetes patients with normal liver function blood results but it should be"*

*Professor Suzanne Norris, Consultant Hepatologist - "This initiative has been life-changing for many of those screened. For those 1 in 5 patients with advanced fibrosis/cirrhosis, awareness means they can now take the necessary steps to prevent further liver damage and to prevent complications such as liver cancer"*

# The importance of Liver Screening for patients with Type 2 Diabetes

The FibroScan® results of a random sample of people with Type 2 Diabetes who were screened for Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) during World Diabetes Week in November 2017.

A FibroScan® Liver Assessment, 10-minute/non-invasive/pain-free scan was carried out on 48 people with Type 2 Diabetes



**1 in 5** (10 PEOPLE) HAD ADVANCED FIBROSIS/ CIRRHOTIC OF THE LIVER

Of the 10 people with advanced fibrosis/cirrhotic...



8 had normal Liver Function Tests (AST/ALT)



9 were non-drinkers or drank less than 10 units of alcohol per week



5 had at least one feature of metabolic syndrome



All 10 had severe fatty liver infiltration

**EASL-EASD-EASO International Clinical Practice Guidelines recommend that for type 2 diabetes, the presence of NAFLD should be screened irrespective of liver enzyme blood tests, since type 2 diabetes people are at high risk of liver disease progression.**

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **NAFLD – A disease associated with diabetes and the obesity epidemic**

As the name suggests, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), is different to liver disease caused by excessive alcohol intake. NAFLD is common in people with type 2 diabetes, high BMIs and/or having a high intake of fat and sugar, commonly referred to as the 'Western diet'.

It has become the most common liver disease in western countries and is the number one cause of cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma in the Western world. It is estimated that Ireland is set to become Europe's most overweight nation by 2025, according to a recent report by the scientific Journal. It is estimated that 36% of the Irish population aged over 50, are classified as obese, and a further 43% are overweight which implies that the prevalence of NAFLD in Ireland is likely to increase significantly in the years to come.

Health risks associated with obesity such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and type 2 diabetes are well known, but awareness of the impact on liver health is under the radar.

### **NAFLD - FACTS**

Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease is defined as an excess of fat on the liver in the absence of increased alcohol intake. There are several factors that increase the risk of developing Fatty Liver and these include diabetes (type 2), high blood pressure, high cholesterol and being over-weight or obese. Approximately, 20% of patients diagnosed with Fatty Liver will develop fat-related inflammation of the liver, called Non-Alcoholic Steato-Hepatitis (NASH). NASH can lead to liver damage and scarring (fibrosis) and if untreated over time, can lead to cirrhosis of the liver.

What is of concern is that NAFLD often displays no symptoms and routine liver blood tests (LFTs) do not differentiate NAFLD from NASH or accurately stage fibrosis (liver scarring).

International Clinical Practice Guidelines recommend that for type 2 diabetes patients, the presence of NAFLD should be screened irrespective of liver enzyme blood tests, since type 2 diabetes patients are at high risk of liver disease progression. The FibroScan liver assessment has been recommended as a validated non-invasive procedure for the identification of patients at risk of NAFLD (in some cases, a liver biopsy may be required).

### **NAFLD can be prevented and/or reversed through healthy eating, exercise and weight reduction.**

**DIABETES IRELAND** are the national charity dedicated to providing support, education and motivation to all people affected by diabetes. We raise public awareness of diabetes and its symptoms and fund Irish-based research into diabetes. We provide excellent services for people living with Type 2. View our Living with Type 2 Diabetes section on [www.diabetes.ie](http://www.diabetes.ie).

Prevalence Rates of Diabetes in Ireland:

It is estimated that there are now 225,840 people with diabetes in Ireland of which 10-15% are Type 1, the remainder are Type 2. Prevalence is forecasted to be 7.5% of the population by 2030.

Type 2 Prevalence: According to the Healthy Ireland survey, 854,165 adults over 40 in the Republic of Ireland are at increased risk of developing (or have) Type 2 diabetes. More alarmingly, there are a further 304,382 in the 30 – 39 year age group that are overweight and not taking the weekly 150 minutes recommended physical activity, leaving them at an increased risk of chronic ill-health. This means that there are 1,158,547 adults in Ireland that need to consider making changes to their daily behaviours in terms of eating healthily and being more active. It is estimated that there are over 15,600 people over 80 years of age living with Type 2 diabetes based on the TILDA study which showed a prevalence of 11.9% in the over 75 age group.

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