

6<sup>th</sup> March 2007

## SDBTT ANNOUNCES RESULTS OF BRAIN CANCER RESEARCH PROJECT

*Charity offers children a better chance*

**Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust (SDBTT)** will be unveiling the headline results of major research from **Nottingham University** into identifying the symptoms of brain tumours in children at the **House of Commons** on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2007. The Charity hopes to persuade the Government to adopt its recommendations for early diagnosis guidelines.

The **Pathways Project**, funded by SDBTT, is headed by David Walker, Professor of Paediatric Oncology. It aims to provide health professionals with the much needed guidance in order to shorten the time between symptoms appearing and the diagnosis of a brain tumour – which can be up to 2-3 times longer in the UK than in North America, Poland, Israel and Switzerland.

Previous research has shown that the longer the symptom interval, the greater the risk of life-threatening and disabling complications during initial treatment, with potentially poorer subsequent psychological well-being and quality of life.

Often children are only diagnosed when it is an emergency and something very alarming and distressing happens. Brain cancers and tumours now kill more children than Leukaemia. Of the survivors, 60% have a significant disability but the hope is that early diagnosis may go some way to improve the long term outcome for these sufferers.

Up till now referral guidelines for doctors have not focussed on symptoms specific to children. Once a tumour is suspected, diagnosis is straightforward either through MRI or CT scan. However, unfortunately in the UK there has been a reluctance in practice to perform such scans early.

“We funded this research because we had personal experience of how difficult it can be to identify the symptoms of brain cancer and that early diagnosis can make a real difference. We are asking parents to help their medical practitioners by looking out for the symptoms. We need every parent in the country to be vigilant,” says Angela Dickson who founded SDBTT with her husband, Neil, 10 years ago.

The key symptoms for children of any age include **impaired movement, nausea and/or vomiting, seizures** and **visual disturbance**. Symptoms in children may present in many different ways, and those under 3 years may show different symptoms to older children.

### Children three years and younger

- Impaired movement of head, face, limbs or body
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Visual disturbance: impaired vision or abnormal eye movements

### Children over three years

- Impaired movement of head, face, limbs or body
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Visual disturbance: impaired vision or abnormal eye movements

- Epileptic fits of seizures
- Altered consciousness
- A large head
- Lethargy
- Weight Loss
- Epileptic fits or seizures
- Altered consciousness
- Headaches
- Disturbance of normal growth
- Abnormal drinking patterns

“Many of these symptoms can be indicative of a wide range of other common childhood illnesses. However as time passes, the persistence and character of a symptom, together with co-existence or development of other symptoms, indicates the need for a scan to exclude or diagnose a brain tumour,” explains Sophie Wilne, Clinical Research Fellow on the Pathways Project.

The research consulted over 150 healthcare professionals in order to produce a number of guidelines which the Nottingham team hope will provide the basis for future Government policy. If a child has had a **persistent headache** or **lethargy** for **4 weeks** or has had any of the **other symptoms** for **2 weeks** they should be given a thorough examination with neurological and visual assessment. If these assessments indicate a brain tumour is likely the child should be sent for a scan immediately.

The Pathways Project research has been presented to National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and will now be sent to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health as well as the Royal College of General Practitioners

Angela Dickson is dedicated to making sure this message reaches all parents, GPs and Paediatricians in the UK: “Early diagnosis of a brain tumour is vital to the long-term quality of life of your child, the sooner treatment can begin, the better. My daughter lost her fight and I want to give other children the best possible chance to beat this cruel disease by improving diagnosis.”

*For press information or journalists wanting to attend on March 6<sup>th</sup> contact:  
Caroline Wilson at Bluebear  
[caroline@bluebear.co.uk](mailto:caroline@bluebear.co.uk), or telephone 01707 320274*

## Notes to Editors

- The Pathways Project, funded by SDBTT was carried out by the Children’s Brain Tumour Research Centre (CBTRC) in collaboration with the Children’s Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) at the Universities of Nottingham and Leicester, respectively.
- Symptoms can be divided into 2 groups: Intracranial pressure - headache + vomiting especially on rising, swelling behind the eyes; tumour location – weak limbs disturbed vision, epilepsy, difficulty swallowing, co-ordination
- The research uses the Delphi Consensus process to validate timescales for referral
- The research team included Prof Sophie Wilne, Prof Jacqueline Collier, Prof Richard Grundy, Mr Jonathan Punt, Prof Colin Kennedy, Dr Karin Koller