Coronation Street actress, Julie Hesmondhalgh to attend momentous Parliamentary debate on pancreatic cancer

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Julie Hesmondhalgh, who played Hayley Cropper in Coronation Street for 16 years, will be attending an important debate in Parliament on 8th September, calling for more funding and awareness of pancreatic cancer. This important step for raising the profile of the disease was reached following a successful e-petition that attracted 106,399 signatures.

Earlier this year, millions of viewers watched the character Hayley deal with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. As a result of playing this part, Julie became aware of the shocking survival statistics for the disease, which at just three per cent has the lowest rate of all 21 common cancers.

Julie wanted to actively campaign for greater research funding and raise awareness of the disease. This included supporting the e-petition, started by Maggie Watts in Scunthorpe, and using her high profile to gain much needed signatures.

Julie said, “My big hope at the beginning of the pancreatic cancer storyline was to help to get the petition to 20,000 signatures. It took a while to get those initial signatures and since then it gained significant momentum. I worked with Maggie, along with many motivated people affected by pancreatic cancer and the charities Pancreatic Cancer Action and Pancreatic Cancer UK to push the petition to the 100,000 signature milestone.

“What the Coronation Street storyline did for pancreatic cancer awareness is phenomenal, but much more attention and funding is required,” continues Julie. “Pancreatic cancer, which only receives 1% of cancer research funding despite being the UK’s fifth deadliest cancer, desperately needs to be in the spotlight.

“The debate is not only important for raising the profile of pancreatic cancer in Parliament but the outcome will hopefully be the catalyst for change which is so desperately needed.”

Maggie Watts started the petition following the death of her husband Kevin, who lost his battle with pancreatic cancer in 2009 aged 48, 40 years after his mother died of the same disease. Maggie said: *“In the 40 years between Kevin and his mother’s death, the shockingly low survival rate of pancreatic cancer has not changed, while survival rates for many other cancers have improved significantly. I was motivated to start the petition so that the government would dedicate more funds to research so that future patients will hopefully face much better prospects.*

“I am so pleased that Julie not only backed the petition, including raising its profile on social media and national TV, but is now also attending the debate to give her personal support to all that have been involved in getting us to this point*.”*

The debate will be led by Nic Dakin MP who is Maggie Watts’ local Member of Parliament.

Ali Stunt, CEO at Pancreatic Cancer Action, and a rare survivor of pancreatic cancer, commented on Julie’s support of the debate: “We are delighted that Julie will be joining the debate and are so grateful to her for all her support with raising awareness and gaining signatures on the petition. 2014 has seen pancreatic cancer finally getting the attention it needs and we, pancreatic cancer survivors, patients and families affected by the disease, are eagerly anticipating a positive outcome for this historic date in Parliament.”

Alex Ford, Chief Executive of Pancreatic Cancer UK, comments, “We can’t thank Maggie and Julie enough, as well as the support of countless others, in bringing about this important debate. Whilst the debate will not lead directly to policy changes, it acts as a crucial tool in keeping the issues surrounding pancreatic cancer at the front of the Minister’s mind. It is also comes at a crucial time politically, a mere nine months ahead of the general election.”

For more information regarding pancreatic cancer and the debate, please visit www.pancreaticcanceraction.org or www.pancreaticcanceruk.org

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