PANCREATIC CANCER PETITION REACHES 100,000 SIGNATURES DAYS BEFORE DEADLINE

Monday 7 April, 2014

Tireless campaigning for signatures on an e-petition calling for more funding and awareness for pancreatic cancer has resulted in the target of 100,000 being reached, just days before the deadline on 8th April 2014.

Pancreatic cancer patients, and families and friends of those who are suffering or have died of the disease, are celebrating this important milestone. The issue will now be considered for debate in The House of Commons.

Pancreatic cancer is the fifth biggest cancer killer in the UK. Every day, 23 people are diagnosed with the disease and they currently face just a three per cent chance of survival, the lowest survival rate of all 22 common cancers. The amount spent on research into the disease stands at just 1% of cancer research funding.

Maggie Watts from Scunthorpe 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 illness. 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 into research so that future patients will hopefully face much better prospects.”

The rate of people signing the e-petition, which was launched in April 2013, was low in the beginning with it attracting only 20,000 signatures in the first six months. Since then, the petition has gained significant momentum. Maggie, along with many motivated people affected by pancreatic cancer and the charity Pancreatic Cancer Action pushed the petition in the media, on social networks and at awareness events attracting over 30,000 signatures in the final week.

High profile support came from numerous celebrities on social media including Pancreatic Cancer Action patron Hugh Grant and Capital 1 DJ Simon Hirst, who both have a personal connection to the disease. Julie Hesmondhalgh, who played pancreatic cancer patient Hayley Cropper in Coronation Street, has provided constant support to the e-petition campaign.

Maggie adds, “The support from people has been astonishing and I would like to thank everyone who helped campaign for signatures as well as those who signed the petition. I started a Facebook Think Tank group three months ago when we only had 30,000 signatures to ask for help in pushing the petition. With so many proactive people coming together with ideas and determined to see 100,000 signatures, this gave petition numbers a real boost.”

Other events to drive more people to sign include a group of families and patients who raised awareness in Glasgow City Centre from an open-top bus, and a successful petition crawl around pubs in Birmingham by the family of Kerry Harvey, a brave campaigner who died of pancreatic cancer at just 24 years old.

Ali Stunt, CEO at Pancreatic Cancer Action, and a rare pancreatic cancer survivor, commented on the e-petition reaching this milestone: “So many people affected by this disease have put a lot of time and energy into reaching this target and I’m absolutely delighted that it has paid off.

“Pancreatic cancer is finally getting the attention it needs, and this fantastic achievement is such great news following our recent advertising campaign, which raised widespread awareness and captured the attention of broadcast, national and regional media.

“The disease has been little known and chronically underfunded for too long,” continues Ali. “The fact that 100,000 people have signed this petition shows how many support the need for change. With the recent news that overall cancer research funding by government in the UK dropped by £19 million between 2012 and 2013, and when we consider the already tiny amount that is spent on pancreatic cancer research, it is vital that this issue gets debated in parliament soon.”

To sign the petition before the deadline, please visit: http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/48389

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