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MEDIA RELEASE

New advice on face equality for patients with disfiguring conditions

Plastic surgeons and health professionals advised of ways
to promote psychological and social rehabilitation

Changing Faces, the UK's leading disfigurement charity, will be launching new advice for plastic surgeons about how to promote the best psycho-social outcomes for their patients, many of whom will have scars and other disfigurements.

Two new sources of advice, one generic and one specific to plastic surgery, will be launched at the Summer Scientific meeting of the British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons (BAPRAS) on 1st July in Leeds:

- *Face Equality for Patients with Disfiguring Conditions* is a new booklet for any health or social care professional or manager in the field.
- *Face Equality for Patients undergoing Plastic Surgery: ideas for meeting their psycho-social needs* is a guide written specifically for plastic surgeons; other guides for dermatologists, maxillo-facial surgeons and others will follow.

Many thousands of people with facial and body disfigurements – from birth, accidents, violence, skin and eye conditions, cancer and facial paralysis – come in contact with the NHS each year, in a GP's clinic, at A&E or in a specialist hospital setting. A whole range of medical specialties provide services for them but many clinicians acknowledge that their patients' psychological and social concerns are not given adequate attention.

Some patients report satisfaction with their care but others are less satisfied:

"The unit was just brilliant – everyone seemed to want to support me. And they even prepared me for leaving the hospital looking a bit different"

"I was amazed that nobody in the clinic asked me how I felt – and that meant that I thought I couldn't tell anyone. It was a conspiracy of silence."

Sophisticated though modern reconstructive surgery is it can rarely remove a disfigurement completely. Some disfigurement or loss of function may remain after the treatment is completed. Most patients will return to their community with a changed appearance.

Research shows that psycho-social problems are common after a disfigurement and can affect the person's self-esteem and self-confidence. This can lead to a fear of public places, low expectations, difficulty in making friends and forming relationships, finding jobs and in extreme cases, suicide.

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Many people who have disfigurements adjust and live rich and happy lives but there is evidence that a significant proportion find it difficult to adjust, and some never come to terms with 'looking different'.

Changing Faces believes that many of these psycho-social problems can be traced to the challenge of living in today's culture in which many are pre-occupied with their appearance and which has negative assumptions about those with disfigurements.

The new advice looks at how health and social care professionals can support and empower patients and their families through the provision of psycho-social care and interventions, overseen by a trained psychologist (or similar). Every member of a clinical team, its leadership and management has a role to play in this – and the advice outlines specific ways that they can do this.

For example, professionals are encouraged to review their own attitudes to disfigurement, to enhance their knowledge of the psycho-social issues associated with disfigurement, and to ensure that the vocabulary they use with their patients is non-stigmatising (ie: avoiding words like 'deformity').

Clinical teams are advised that psycho-social concerns should be treated as a normal effect of having a disfiguring condition and managed as a routine part of the clinical care process. Assessment and integrating appropriate interventions into care pathways should become standard practice – as they are now in some examples cited in the guides and booklet. The attention of managers and policy-makers is drawn to some of the guidance and best practice now available.

The new advice is launched with the full support of BAPRAS. Professor Simon Kay, President of BAPRAS comments: "This is an area previously neglected but of enormous significance. Plastic surgeons and health and social care managers will benefit greatly from this advice. In turn it is important that we demonstrate leadership and extend the message to others in the field".

Henrietta Spalding, Head of Professional Development at *Changing Faces* says: "We are delighted that BAPRAS has given this new advice such a powerful launch pad. It has the capacity to transform the care that patients with many different disfiguring conditions can expect in the future enabling them to live confidently in a world in which face equality is not yet a reality".

-ENDS-

Notes for Editors

- For further information, please contact Rekha Patel, Press and Communications Officer, T: 020 7391 9276, E: rekhap@changingfaces.org.uk
- The new advice launched at BAPRAS has been brought together by James Partridge and his team at *Changing Faces* based on the charity's own experience over 17 years and the insights learned from clinical and academic research. A strong team of psychologists, academics and clinicians helped to write the advice complementing the views expressed by people with disfigurements themselves and their parents.
- The Face Equality Campaign was launched in May 2008. The aim of the campaign is to make sure that everyone, irrespective of their facial appearance, is treated equally and fairly. These new resources will play a key part in launching the charity's Face Equality in Health campaign, which aims to guide health professionals in giving the best service and care to people with disfigurements across the UK.
- A specific guide on dermatology will be launched at the British Association of Dermatologists' meeting in Glasgow on 6th July 2009.
- *Changing Faces* is a UK Registered Charity, No. 1011222, launched in 1992 by James Partridge OBE, DSc (Hon), who sustained severe burn injuries following a car accident at the age of 18. The charity supports and represents people with disfigurements of the face or body from any cause.
- *Changing Faces* employs a team of specialists who offer counselling and a range of practical strategies to children, young people, their families and adults with disfigurements, to enable them to manage public reactions and succeed in every part of their life. It offers a consultancy and training service to health professionals, teachers and employers on best practice in teaching, recruiting or providing customer service for people with disfigurements.
- Over 1 million people in the UK have a disfigurement to the face or body. Over 500,000 people have disfigurements to the face – one in every 111. Disfigurement can affect anyone, at any time or at any age. A disfigurement may be present at birth as a result of a birthmark or a craniofacial condition. Scarring, paralysis and other disfigurements can also be acquired following an accident, violence, an eye or skin condition, a surgical mistake, or cancer surgery.
- For more information, please visit <http://www.changingfaces.org.uk>

About BAPRAS

www.bapras.org.uk

BAPRAS, the British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery, is the voice of plastic surgery in the UK. It aims to increase the understanding of the professional specialty and scope of plastic surgery, promoting innovation in teaching, learning and research. Founded in 1946 (originally as the British Association of Plastic Surgeons), today BAPRAS has over 770 members and is the main professional representative body for reconstructive and aesthetic plastic surgeons providing services to patients on the NHS and privately in the UK.

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Members of the public can find a member plastic surgeon in their area by logging on to www.bapras.org.uk. Anyone can check the GMC to find out if a surgeon is on the plastic surgery specialist register; <http://www.gmc-uk.org/register/search/index.asp>

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