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Media Release

Royal United Hospital patient receives national diabetes award

A patient at the Royal United Hospital (RUH), has received the prestigious Lawrence medal from Diabetes UK in recognition of 60 years' triumph over the condition.

Les Sharpe, aged 69, from Corsham, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when he was just eight years old. He currently injects himself four times a day, and has to test his blood three or four times daily. Patients with Type 1 diabetes typically have four injections per day - that's an average of 1,460 injections annually. Les estimates he's injected himself with insulin some 68,000 times over the years.

Despite his condition, Les remains upbeat and never lets things get him down. He runs a successful pottery, supplying decorated pots, jugs and mugs to National Trust shops, specialist gift outlets and galleries. He has been married to his wife Sally for 28 years.

Les said: "It's a lot easier now than it was in the 1950s. Nowadays if you present with symptoms, blood tests are taken. If it has to be insulin controlled the correct dosage can be worked out quickly, thanks to the brilliant technology and the highly-skilled medical staff available today.

"Diabetes is a nuisance, not a problem. I keep it under control with the help and support of my wife and family. If I want a whiskey or a cake, I'll have one. I live a perfectly normal life."

The RUH diabetes team is led by four consultants, including consultant diabetologist Dr Alex Ward, who presented the medal to Les at a recent ceremony.

She said: "To have successfully negotiated his way through this condition for more than 60 years is some achievement. Les has clearly never let the condition hold him back, or prevent him from living life to the full. He is an inspiration to old and young."

Dr Ward holds a weekly clinic at Chippenham Community Hospital. Together with diabetes specialist nurses Nikki Hillier and Lesley Amer, she provides support to patients from North Wiltshire close to home, so avoiding the need to travel into Bath for appointments. Dr Ward recently expanded the service to include a young person's clinic, as the needs of teenagers with diabetes are very different from those of older adults. Les is in talks with the team to see what help and encouragement he can give to youngsters and their parents who are starting out on a diabetic way of life.

Les is also a regular at the Chippenham & District Diabetes Group which meets six times a year in the Jubilee Building, 32 Market Place, Chippenham. People with Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, plus family and friends, are most welcome to attend. The next meetings are scheduled for September 21 and November 16, 2011 at 7.30pm. For more information call 01249 653007.

Notes to editors

Around 330,000 people (including children) have Type 1 diabetes in the UK.

Type 1 diabetes develops when the pancreas stops making insulin (the hormone which lowers blood sugar). Patients like Les Sharpe therefore need insulin injections from the start.

The more common Type 2 diabetes can often be treated through diet and tablets alone.

The commonest age for Type 1 diabetes to develop is between 10 and 14 years, though it is becoming increasingly frequent in much younger children. It may develop in adults of any age.

The Robert Lawrence Medal is awarded to someone who has lived with diabetes for 60 years.

Dr Robert Lawrence did not show any of the classic symptoms of diabetes, such as thirst or blurred vision, and was diagnosed by chance when admitted to hospital for a severe eye infection in 1920. He consequently devoted his life to the condition.

Dr Lawrence worked with HG Wells in the formation of the Diabetic Association and was elected Chairman - a position he held until 1961.

Photograph: Please note a photograph has been provided with this press release.

Caption - Les Sharpe receives medal from Dr Alex Ward to mark 60 years successfully living with diabetes.