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Media Release

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Awards for 50 years 'triumph' over diabetes

Three patients from the RUH have been awarded the special Alan Nabarro Medal in recognition of their 50 years triumph over diabetes.

Christopher Leak, Stephanie James and Peter Waring were recently presented with their medals by Consultant Endocrinologist Dr John Reckless at the Royal United Hospital. Dr Reckless says: "Coping with this disorder creates a lot of lifestyle pressures and difficulties and Christopher, Stephanie and Peter have done remarkably well. The Nabarro Medal is a sign to individuals that there is a life with diabetes."

Developments in medicine have changed the way diabetes is managed today. 50 years ago insulin administration was a complicated procedure. Syringes were large clumsy glass contraptions with 1.5cm needles that required sterilisation with surgical spirit prior to each injection and weekly boiling. Now needles are dispensable and almost microscopic in size. Insulin is now purified and comes in different formats in an attempt to make a patient's experience as pleasant as possible.

Christopher, from Wiltshire, was 15 when he was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, "I was suffering from huge weight loss and an unquenchable thirst, it didn't take the doctors long to work out what was wrong. Back then I had to test my blood four times a day, every day, and this was done by testing a urine sample mixed with water and a special tablet and then keeping a daily record. The injections were horrendous - like horse needles. The syringe had to be carried around in surgical spirit in a huge jam jar. Things are far simpler these days and now I manage with insulin injections three times a day. Dr Reckless is an excellent consultant and I am very grateful for his care over the last 25 years."

When Stephanie James was diagnosed with diabetes at seven years old, her parents were told she probably wouldn't live past her 17th birthday: "But here I am, only recently retired after training and working as a registered nurse for over 20 years at the RUH. Back in 1958 I was admitted to hospital as I was losing a lot of weight, they initially thought I had diphtheria. I feel very fortunate to have managed my diabetes so well due in no small way to the excellent continuity of care I received from Dr Reckless."

As a child aged 10, Peter was always being told he didn't look well: "I was always massively thirsty and very pale. I ended up being admitted to the RUH and they sorted me out. Injections used to be very painful but now I use a Novopen to inject insulin, which is very discreet. The treatment is very flexible and you can easily fit it around your lifestyle, it doesn't have to take over your life."

Notes for Editors:

Please contact the Communications Team with interview requests.

Diabetes is a common condition and more than 1.4 million people in the UK have it. There is also an estimated one million people who have diabetes but don't know it. There are two types of diabetes.

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In Type 1 diabetes the body doesn't produce insulin, the hormone that controls the amount of glucose in the blood. It usually begins before the age of 40 and is treated with insulin. In Type 2 diabetes, the body doesn't produce enough insulin, or what it does produce doesn't work properly. It usually affects people over 40 and can be treated with healthy eating and physical activity alone, although it often requires tablets and some insulin. Both types are equally serious and reduce life expectancy by some 30%.

The medal is named after Alan D N Nabarro, OBE, who waged a life-long battle against discrimination against people with diabetes. He served the British Diabetic Association for over 30 years before his death in 1977. In 1922 he had been diagnosed diabetic and given six months to live. That he completed not merely six months, but 55 years, was due to the discovery of insulin, which was administered to the first human patient in January 1922.

Unfortunately diabetes can cause a number of complications including an increase in cardiovascular risk (stroke, heart attacks), and microvascular complications which affect the eyes, kidneys and nerves. Individuals who have managed to survive for 50 years with diabetes will have done so through meticulous care and good general support.

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