



australian diagnostic imaging association

PRESS RELEASE

Sunday 20 October 2013

Treat bones like breasts

World Osteoporosis Day - Sunday 20 October

The new Federal Government is being urged to 'treat bones like breasts' and increase funding for the early detection of osteoporosis.

The call has come from the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) which believes action is needed to tackle the rising toll of death and injury due to osteoporosis.

"We all applaud the great health benefits generated by Australia's national breast screening program over the past two decades," said ADIA President, Dr Sue Ulreich.

"Everyone recognises that this focus on early detection has saved lives, saved heartache and saved money.

"It's time we did the same for osteoporosis which is another major health issue primarily affecting Australian women."

- Almost 700,000 Australians - more than 80% of them women - have been diagnosed with osteoporosis. However, the real number of sufferers is likely to be much higher as osteoporosis is generally only diagnosed after a bone is broken.
- Half of all women and one-third of men over 60 in Australia will have a fracture due to osteoporosis, and 50% of them will have more than one.
- In women aged over 45, osteoporosis accounts for more days spent in hospital than many other diseases including diabetes and breast cancer.
- Most osteoporotic fractures occur in the hip and pelvis. Some 20% of people who suffer a hip fracture will die within six months. Another 40% will be unable to walk without help or stay in their own homes - some even need full time nursing care.

"Clearly, it's a huge problem. Too many people die and far too many experience significant pain and trauma from fractures which occur because they didn't know they had osteoporosis - they didn't know they should be amending their lifestyle to prevent injury," Dr Ulreich said.

"And, with Australia's ageing population, the issue is only going to get worse."

Diagnostic imaging is the only way to quantitatively diagnose osteoporosis, to give sufferers the best chance of avoiding serious injury.

Dual-energy X-ray Absorptiometry Scanning (DXA or DEXA) is used to accurately measure a person's Bone Mineral Density.

However, this test can be expensive and Medicare - which was created to be the health insurance scheme for all Australians - has not kept up.

For some people with risk factors, this diagnostic imaging service is simply not funded through Medicare. For those that are funded, the rebate has not been indexed to match rising costs since 1998, so 'the gap' people have to pay has been steadily increasing - to the point where it is now simply unaffordable for many.

"This financial burden is especially heavy on older Australians, the very people most likely to be suffering from osteoporosis and often dealing with other chronic health issues as well," Dr Ulreich said.

To improve the situation ADIA believes Medicare needs to be funded to allow 'at risk' individuals to have more affordable access to regular Bone Mass Density testing via diagnostic imaging.

"As we do with breast cancer, if we invest in early diagnosis and treatment we reduce the cascade effect of this silent disease - we'll save lives, save heartache and save the health care system money in the long term," Dr Ulreich said.

"Osteoporosis is a huge health and financial burden, so let's deal with it in a way that we know works."

BACKGROUND

Osteoporosis is a systemic skeletal disease that causes bones to become thin, weak and fragile, increasing the likelihood of fractures from even a minor bump or accident. The disease impairs density of the bone as well as its structural quality. It has been diagnosed in 3.4% of Australians, with women (81.9%) and people aged 55 years and over (84%) accounting for the largest segments of sufferers. It has no overt symptoms therefore is known to be under-diagnosed, and the actual prevalence is thought to be considerably higher.

Osteoporosis is an insidious and silent disease that wastes away bones in people aged over 50. But its foundations are laid much earlier in life so people in their 20s and 30s - women, in particular - need to care for their bones from this early age.

Osteoporosis is a largely preventable condition and changes in lifestyle, as well as appropriate management of patients with the condition and falls prevention programs, can help reduce the incidence and impact of osteoporosis in Australia.

To find out more about the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) visit www.adia.asn.au.

MEDIA

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