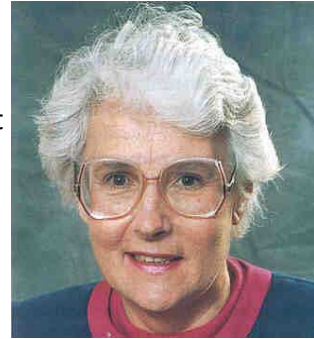


Guest Editorial

Loose lips will save hips

Hon. Margaret Austin is chair of Osteoporosis New Zealand

One in four women and one in eight men over the age of 50 and of Caucasian or Asian descent have osteoporosis. In New Zealand the incidence of hip fractures has increased from about 350 in 1950 to well over 2000 in 1987. That is at least three times the increase in the population. Furthermore, it is estimated that 40 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men over 65 will experience a fracture with the inevitable impairment to quality of life.



Ageing, the influence of heredity on bone density, inadequate calcium in the diet, the consequences of menopause in women, the effects of some prescribed drugs, inactivity and to some extent high alcohol and caffeine intake as well as smoking: put them together and we have a mix which for many New Zealand women and men results in osteoporosis.

Clearly osteoporosis is a pandemic public health issue and much needs to be done in New Zealand if we are to diagnose and successfully manage all who have it and do all we can to prevent it among those who have not. The costs of and pressure on both hospitals and community based care from fractures are very great.

Surveys show that public awareness of osteoporosis and its causes are high but regrettably few are determined to make suitable changes to their lifestyles and diet. Many people are in denial that they will be affected by osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis New Zealand will be launched by its Patron, Lady Hardy-Boyes, at Government House on 18 October and at a public function in Wellington on World Osteoporosis Day on 20 October.

The initiative to form an incorporated society has resulted from nationwide collaboration between health professionals, members of the public who either have or are concerned about osteoporosis, the Arthritis Foundation and the Osteoporosis Society of Canterbury. An inaugural Board was formed in December 1998 to develop a strategic plan and policies for the organisation and to secure funding. The support of the Arthritis Foundation during this process is gratefully acknowledged.

We have set ourselves the goals of initiating and facilitating appropriate interventions to reduce the incidence of osteoporosis in New Zealand through:

- promoting public and professional awareness of osteoporosis, its risks, prevention and treatment
- promoting and publicising research into osteoporosis in New Zealand
- advocating for greater recognition among decision makers of osteoporosis as a critical public health issue
- promoting and supporting education and effective management for people

with osteoporosis.

Creating a climate of awareness and knowledge among health professionals and the public is of value but will go unheeded unless there is an energetic advocacy group actively engaging with decision makers on a nationwide basis. This includes the Minister and Ministry of Health, the HFA, Pharmac, the Health Research Council, ACC and the Foundation for Research Science and Technology to name a few.

Our priorities for 1999-2000 are to launch the organisation, to establish on-going contact with decision makers, to target awareness and education programmes at those most at risk and to produce guidelines for diagnosis and management of osteoporosis for health professionals.

The Board is convinced that the time is right for the formation of Osteoporosis New Zealand and is committed to its success. Yes, we have a new national organisation and, yes, we need your support.