

GAA and ABI Ireland Launch Concussion Awareness Campaign

The GAA Backs ABI Ireland's *Mind Your Head* Campaign; Educating Players about the Signs and Symptoms of Concussion

Dublin 19th October 2011: The GAA has teamed up with brain injury specialists Acquired Brain Injury Ireland to back their *Mind Your Head* campaign; educating players about the signs and symptoms of Concussion, through an Educational Concussion Poster Campaign. This poster campaign will be distributed to over 2,000 GAA clubs throughout the country, reaching out to all players of every age and level.

Concussion; a physical injury to the brain resulting from an impact to the head, has become an issue of topical debate being declared by many as a misunderstood injury, and an area in need of stepped up educational measures. This poster campaign acts as a first step in the Concussion Education Process, in an effort to raise awareness of the injury amongst young GAA players throughout the country.

GAA Director General Páraic Duffy welcomed the initiative being organised by Acquired Brain Injury Ireland.

He said: "The GAA is delighted to be involved with any work that shines a light on this type of injury.

"Our games by their nature are physical games and this is one of the appealing features of them for so many followers of both football and hurling.

"However, while acknowledging that, there is also an onus on us to do everything we can to inform our players – at all levels – of the dangers of injuries such as concussion and to that end I fully endorse the work our Scientific and Medical Welfare Committee, under the guidance of Dr Danny Mulvihill, has overseen with Acquired Brain Injury Ireland."

Speaking at the launch of the campaign Barbara O' Connell Chief Executive of Acquired Brain Injury Ireland; Irelands leading provider of Community based Neuro-Rehabilitation services said, "This Poster Campaign that ABI Ireland and the GAA have worked together on is a part of ABI Irelands 'ABI Education and Prevention Programme'. With increasing awareness in the levels of concussion being suffered within the sporting arena, sporting organisations in particular need to take a proactive approach, by creating awareness of concussion and educating their players effectively. We were delighted to have the support of the GAA to carry out this education and prevention campaign to such a mass sporting audience nationwide. Both ABI Ireland and the GAA are passionate about educating players, coaches and parents about the severity of concussion, and the way through which they themselves can take on the responsibility to self monitor any of the indicating signs.

"Concussion is not a life-threatening injury, but it can cause both short-term and long-term problems when not managed effectively. If players return to the field with a concussion there is a risk of second impact syndrome, during which the brain swells rapidly, resulting in serious brain injury. Players, coaches, medical staff and even parents, at every level of sport should be aware of the signs and symptoms of concussion, and know exactly what to look out for in the hours of recovery after a hit. For example, our players should be able to make

the connection of feeling nauseas, a few hours after taking a hit to the head, to being concussed. In doing so the player will know they have had an injury that needs to be seen to, and so be protected from any long-term damage, recovering to full fitness effectively”, she said.

Based on a study over the 2008-2009 seasons it emerged that footballers are three times more likely to be concussed during a game than hurlers. ABI Ireland GAA Ambassador, and Physiotherapist Professional, Dublin football player Paul Griffin was present at the launch of the poster campaign speaking on behalf of both the players and professionals, within the sporting industry, he said, “Concussion is an issue and risk in all contact sports like GAA, and people need to recognise the injury and treat it effectively just like they would any other, such as a knee or ligament injury. Following best practice guidelines will reduce the risk of longer periods away from the game and also the risk of sustaining longer lasting affects from concussion”.

“Proper assessment and management of a suspected concussed player needs to be enforced. Unfortunately as players we are our own worst enemies and often don’t take this into consideration. Players will have to be protected from themselves, and so it becomes the responsibility of managers, coaches, selectors and even parents or partners, to ensure the proper medical attention is given to any player they suspect may have been concussed”, he said.

Concussion is not diagnosed by just loss of consciousness; a mild concussion can cause the player to become both dizzy and confused, often with a loss of memory of the event for just a few minutes. A severe concussion may involve prolonged loss of consciousness, with a delayed return to normal. The abnormality in concussion does not present itself in terms of a blood clot or bruising to the brain, making it difficult to diagnose, and so the role of clinical and neuropsychological assessment is essential should symptoms persist.

Fellow ABI Ireland GAA Ambassadors, and All-Star nominees, Michael Darragh Macauley and Rory O’ Carroll were also present at the launch showing their support to the campaign; Michael Darragh Macauley said “It’s a great initiative by both the GAA and ABI Ireland because it’s definitely an issue players don’t know enough about, and don’t take seriously. As Paul said we are our own worst enemies. No player will volunteer to sit out of any game if they can avoid it. I think when it comes to concussion we think we can avoid being honest about it because it’s not visual. When I broke my finger it put me out for a few weeks in the summer; there was definitely no hiding that injury. I knew the extra damage I would do if I continued to play with it. We need to start thinking about Concussion in the same way”.

Rory O’ Carroll agreed with Macauley saying; “I’d say every player has at some stage taken a bang to the head without giving it the attention it deserves. With one concussion leaving you more vulnerable for a second, we are putting ourselves at risk. I think this campaign will make players think about that before they decide to play on, and to be honest about their injury. Whether playing club or county we are all guilty of it. However, the more players that begin to take concussion seriously, and abide by the return to play guidelines, the more everyone can give one hundred and ten percent to their game; performing to the best of their ability”.

The Concussion Education Poster campaign titled *Not Always A Knock -Out* makes Concussion a visual injury, by teaching players, coaches and parents the signs and symptoms to look out for, after taking a hit to the head. It also provides details for a return-to-play action plan, with website details for further information. The poster itself, educating

society about a misunderstood injury, will be displayed in every GAA clubhouse and ABI Ireland service throughout the country.

For more information see www.gaa.ie or www.abiireland.ie

About Acquired Brain Injury Ireland

Established in 2000, Acquired Brain Injury Ireland (formerly the Peter Bradley Foundation) was set up to provide a range of pioneering, flexible and tailor-made services to people with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). The Community based Neuro-Rehabilitation services provided by the organisation place a critical emphasis on client-centeredness, quality, effectiveness and value for money. Rehabilitation and clinical support are key aspects to the service.

Approximately 13,000 people suffer from a head injury in Ireland each year and face a dramatically altered life thereafter. People with ABI progress at different rates, and may need to access services at different points in time as their needs change. Within each stage of rehabilitation a range of different service providers is involved, which must be coordinated. Once back in the community the emphasis is on more extended activities of daily living, integration, and return to work or education. Interventions focus on enhanced participation, improved quality of life, psychological adjustment and carer stress. Acquired Brain Injury Ireland is filling a vital service gap, in collaboration with statutory bodies.