

**April is Parkinson's Awareness Month:
and four other little known facts about PD**

One of the first illustrations of Parkinson's disease (PD) was published in 1886 and since then, it has been widely understood as a disease that only affects the senior population, primarily characterized by shaking. The truth is that PD affects individuals of all ages, ethnicities and genders. It doesn't discriminate, and that's the message that Parkinson Society British Columbia (PSBC) is looking to promote during Parkinson's Awareness Month this April. PD manifests itself through a wide spectrum of symptoms. While there are many potential challenges, it is important to keep in mind that the disease is unique to every individual.

Here are four lesser known facts about Parkinson's disease:

- 1. People with Parkinson's may experience complications with communication & swallowing.** Hypokinetic dysarthria, a speech disorder that causes rigidity and slowness in breathing, swallowing, voice and speech, is a condition that can affect individuals with Parkinson's. Individuals that experience these symptoms may report feelings of increased social isolation and difficulty communicating their needs to health care providers and care partners. A speech language pathologist (SLP) can help provide treatment for this condition. One way to learn more about communication & swallowing difficulties is by attending one of our workshops facilitated by a SLP trained in the Lee Silverman Voice Treatment (LSVT) LOUD method. These events are interactive and participatory in nature, and provide attendees with the tools they need to manage their symptoms.
- 2. Exercise has been proven to help manage Parkinson's symptoms.** Experts have concluded that exercise can help with symptom management and even slow disease progression. National Parkinson Foundation's *Parkinson's Outcome Project* has identified that the most beneficial exercise should be consistent and intense enough to induce heavy breathing and increase heart rate. This is why many of PSBC's programs and events encourage active living – from fundraising events such as The Parkinson's Movement, to our train-the-trainer workshops with Parkinson's Wellness Recovery (PWR!) and Dance for PD®.
- 3. At least 50% of people with Parkinson's disease experience depression and/or anxiety.** Disruption in natural sleep-wake cycle can contribute to daytime fatigue. This, in combination with changes in brain chemistry, can lead to mood changes, such as depression and anxiety. PSBC encourages individuals who may be experiencing these symptoms to turn to their doctor and support networks for help. Our support groups meet regularly in over 50 communities across British Columbia. For those looking for

specialized, one-on-one counselling support, PSBC has two clinical counsellors on staff available for free, short-term sessions. These sessions are 100% confidential and can take place in person at our downtown office, by phone or over skype.

- 4. British Columbians with Parkinson's disease may have to wait 18 to 24 months to see a movement disorder specialist.** Due to the complexity of PD, general practitioners often refer patients to a neurologist who specializes in movement disorders. As there are only three movement disorder clinics in B.C., the waitlists are often long. Patterns of hospitalizations strongly suggest that unless a patient with Parkinson's is under the care of a movement disorder specialist, their overall condition will worsen. It is for this reason that PSBC has identified reducing wait list times as one of their main advocacy efforts. Increased awareness around the disease as well as continued advocacy for people with Parkinson's is necessary to improve the lives of those living with PD.

For more information on Parkinson's disease or any of PSBC's programs, services and resources visit our website at www.parkinson.bc.ca or call 1-800-668-3330.

You are not alone, we are here to help.