



PRESS RELEASE

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New campaign asks parents to be brain tumour aware

INSERT DATE: A new campaign is being launched to help parents and health professionals spot the signs of brain tumours in children and young people. HeadSmart aims to speed up diagnosis rates and raise awareness of brain tumour symptoms.

Louise Pennell visited the doctor several times with her four year old son, Tom before he was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Louise said:

"By themselves, the signs he had might not have indicated a brain tumour, it was the pattern of symptoms which was important."

"Parents and carers should not panic, but they do know their children better than anyone else. If you're concerned then get them seen by a doctor, and take them back if necessary. At best, it will turn out to be nothing, in which case you gain peace of mind - if it is a brain tumour then early diagnosis may save your child's life."

Around 500 children and young people a year are diagnosed with a brain tumour - nearly ten a week - and a quarter of all child cancers occur in the brain. Survival rates have improved over the past 20 years but brain tumours remain the leading cause of cancer deaths in children. The symptoms of a brain tumour can often be similar to those of other illnesses; as a result they are frequently mistaken for less serious conditions. It can take up to three months for a child to be diagnosed in the UK – three times longer than in the United States and Canada. Delays in diagnosis contribute to a higher death rate and lifelong disability, which child brain tumour survivors are ten times more likely to suffer from.

HeadSmart is a new joint campaign by the Children's Brain Tumour Research Centre at the University of Nottingham, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) and the Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust that aims to raise awareness of brain tumour symptoms by helping parents and health professionals spot the signs of brain tumours in children and young people.

To do this the HeadSmart campaign has launched a range of resources, including a new website, leaflets and a pocket-sized 'symptoms card'. These provide information for doctors, parents, carers and young people about how to spot the signs of a possible brain tumour. These are available online from today.

Founder of the Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust Neil Dickson said;

“Having taken 9 months for our own daughter to be diagnosed with a brain tumour, and receiving many calls from parents who experienced similar delays, we strongly believe that more should be done to reduce the time taken for a diagnosis, and that is why Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust is a partner in the HeadSmart Campaign. Tragically this comes too late for Samantha, but by increasing the awareness of symptoms among parents and healthcare professionals, it doesn’t need to be too late for others.”

Professor David Walker, Professor of Paediatric Oncology at the Children’s Brain Tumour Research Centre, said:

“Brain tumours are fortunately rare, but they do happen, and it can be difficult for doctors to diagnose because the symptoms can often mimic less serious illnesses. Parents have no need to worry if their child occasionally experiences headaches, for example, but if symptoms come back frequently or are present for more two weeks or more, see your family doctor. The most important thing is that parents and family doctors know the symptoms of child brain tumours and make sure that possible cases are diagnosed as quickly as possible”.

Dr Jan Dudley, Chair of the RCPCH Clinical Standards Committee, Executive of Headsmart project board, said:

“The UK lags behind other developed countries in the time taken for brain tumours to be diagnosed. The Headsmart campaign aim of increasing public and professional awareness of brain tumours in children is crucial in addressing this imbalance.”

To find out more visit www.headsmart.org.uk.

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For media inquiries, please contact **Zoe Thorogood**, **Kate Moffat** or **Thea O’Hear** on 020 7618 9185 or at headsmart@luther.co.uk

Notes to Editors

1. HeadSmart is a joint campaign by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health www.rcpch.ac.uk, the Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust <http://braintumourtrust.co.uk/> and the Children’s Brain Tumour Research Centre at the University of Nottingham <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cbtrc/index.aspx>
2. Evidence based best practice guidelines *The Diagnosis of Brain Tumours in Children*, endorsed by Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), for the referral of children with suspected brain tumours have been developed and are available from <http://www.rcpch.ac.uk> and www.HeadSmart.org.uk
3. The HeadSmart project is funded by The Health Foundation and Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust

4. The most typical symptoms of brain tumour in children and young people include:

- Persistent or recurring vomiting
- Persistent or recurring headaches
- Deteriorating vision
- Blurred or double vision
- Poor balance and co-ordination
- Abnormal eye movements
- Fits or seizures
- Behavioural changes, especially tiredness

In older children or teenagers, symptoms can also include slow or late start of puberty.

5. For further enquiries about the campaign, or for media enquiries contact the HeadSmart communications team on headsmart@luther.co.uk or 0207 618 9185