



## **Press Release**

**15 November 2022**

**For Immediate Release**

### **Clinical Director Puts Spotlight on Male Mental Health Issues**

A Clinical Director from a leading healthcare company has spoken about the importance of using Movember to raise awareness of men's mental health issues.

Jon van Niekerk is the Group Clinical Director at Cygnet Health Care which provides services for individuals with mental health needs, learning disabilities and autism. He is actively taking part in Movember, an annual event involving the growing of moustaches during the month of November to raise awareness of men's health issues, such as prostate cancer, testicular cancer, and men's suicide.

Jon has explained why it is a cause he encourages others to support, how men can support their own mental health and how loved ones can support those who may be struggling.

He said: "It has become an annual tradition for me to grow a moustache as part of 'Movember' and I hope many will join me and help raise awareness of men's mental and physical health issues."

Movember began by raising awareness for prostate and testicular cancer but quickly expanded into mental health and suicide prevention.

Jon explained: "This is an essential awareness month, as men are dying far too young. Men die on average six years younger than women due to mostly preventable health issues. Movember is a fun event with a serious message and I want to encourage as many as possible to join me in highlighting these important matters."

Like Jon, you can grow a moustache to raise awareness but women can take part too by getting involved in "Make a Move" for Movember – walking, running, or participating in any physical activity over 60 kilometres during the month. This is 60km for the 60 men we lose to suicide each hour globally.

Jon added: "Every year I feel compelled to do something and to get involved. The rate of suicide is alarmingly high, particularly in men. Too many men are toughing it out, keeping their feelings to themselves and struggling in silence. Movember's mission is to reduce the rate of male suicide by 25% by 2030, and each year I want to say I was a part of the movement in achieving this. We all face difficulties in life, it's part of being human. Movember represents the ability to bring everyone together. It reinforces that no one is alone and that together we can do better."

Whilst growing a moustache can seem an odd thing to do, it kick-starts a conversation that can lead to talking about these serious issues, as well as raising important funds. Men can be guilty of bottling things up and this can escalate and those around them do not always know they are going through a difficult period. So for me, taking part is about raising awareness, starting a conversation and making men more comfortable with sharing and talking."

Jon wanted to share advice to men who may be feeling low and suffering with their mental health.

He explained: “My advice is to seek connection. Men find it difficult to talk about their mental health issues because of the cultural dilemma where men feel the need to appear strong. Happiness lies in connection and to connect with a human being you need to be open and vulnerable and talk about the real you. If we are more connected with those around us, that is ultimately what is going to give us happiness in this life.

“Investing in your emotional capital is so important and we need a balance in our lives of looking after our mental health and our physical health. These can be simple steps like eating healthily, going to the gym, socialising with friends and avoiding social media. Small steps can have a big impact. Looking after yourself is a decision. All of us are worth that self-investment.”

Offering words of advice to those who may be seeing their loved ones suffering, he said: “My advice to those who have men in your lives who may be struggling, my easiest suggestion is to ‘ask twice’. The question: ‘How are you?’ will often be met with the response: ‘Fine’. But asked a second time: ‘No, how are you really?’ may open up more of a dialogue. Encourage a conversation, actively listen and highlight the changes you have noticed. Do engage with your loved ones GP too if you have serious concerns about their health.

“I hope you now want to join me this Movember. Your help could save a father, a brother, a son, a friend, a partner. Raising awareness really can start important conversations and save a life. Stop men dying too young.”

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**Notes to Editors:**

For more information, please contact Gemma Attew, External Communications Manager, on [gemmaattew@cygnethealth.co.uk](mailto:gemmaattew@cygnethealth.co.uk) or 07718 244811.

**About Cygnet Health Care**

Cygnet Health Care has been providing a national network of high-quality, specialised mental health services for the NHS and local authorities for the past 30 years.

Cygnet Health Care’s pioneering services support people with complex and acute mental health needs across the UK.

As one of the best quality providers in mental health services in the country, Cygnet Health Care’s focus is always on the best outcomes for those who use or commission its services. 85% of Cygnet’s facilities are rated as good or outstanding, which is above the national average.

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