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News Release

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Rugby legend joins quest to tackle motor neurone disease

Scotland rugby legend George “Doddie” Weir is joining forces with researchers to help tackle motor neurone disease (MND).

The former British and Irish Lion – who earned 61 caps for Scotland and is now an award-winning after-dinner speaker and MC – has announced his diagnosis to raise awareness of the condition for Global MND Awareness Day.

Doddie Weir said: "Over the past few months a number of friends and family have raised concerns surrounding my health. I think then, that on this day set to help raise awareness of the condition, I should confirm that I too have Motor Neurone Disease. I should like to take this opportunity to thank the National Health Service in recognising then diagnosing this, as yet, incurable disease.

“I am currently on holiday in New Zealand with Kathy and the boys and when we return, I will devote my time towards assisting research and raising awareness and funds to help support fellow sufferers. There are plans in place to create a charitable foundation to help in any way we can and we will share these details with you after our family trip.”

Doddie is supporting researchers in their quest to better understand the disease, in the hope that it will eventually lead to new therapies.

MND – also known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig’s Disease – is a progressive disease. It occurs when specialised nerve cells called motor neurons break down.

These cells usually transmit messages from the brain and spinal cord to tell muscles in the body what to do. In MND, messages from the nerves gradually stop reaching the muscles, which causes them to weaken and waste away.

Eventually, this leads to paralysis and difficulties with speech, swallowing and breathing.

There are no therapies that can stop progression of MND and little is known about why the disease strikes some but not others.

Doddie Weir has pledged his support for research at the Euan MacDonald Centre, a Scotland-wide research initiative based at the University of Edinburgh.

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The Centre was set up in 2007 by Donald MacDonald, a leading Scottish businessman, and his son Euan, who was diagnosed with MND in 2003.

The Centre supports and undertakes cutting-edge research into MND as well as training the next generation of research leaders.

The former second-row and No. 8 forward follows in the footsteps of another rugby legend in his support for the Centre. South Africa's Joost Van Der Westhuizen visited the Centre in 2013 to share knowledge and expertise.

Van Der Westhuizen – who was an opponent of Doddie's in the 1990s – also had MND and passed away in 2017.

Professor Siddharthan Chandran, Director of the Euan MacDonald Centre for Motor Neurone Disease Research, said: "We are immensely grateful to Doddie for his support at this difficult time for him and his family. Working in partnership with other researchers and charities such as MND Scotland, our goal is to bring forward the day when there are effective treatments for this very tough condition."

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