

MEDIA RELEASE**Landmark study shows GPs can prescribe weight loss as they would medication to treat osteoarthritis**

Sydney, 15 February 2016 – GPs across Australia are being encouraged to refer eligible osteoarthritis (OA) patients to an innovative medical weight-loss and strengthening program, with positive and sustainable outcomes now proven in a landmark study.

The study was conducted by a team of Australian and international osteoarthritis experts, published in January 2016 in *Arthritis Care & Research*¹, and has for the first time shown that there is a strong dose relationship between thresholds of weight loss and meaningful symptom improvement for OA sufferers enrolled in a 'real world' program.

The "Osteoarthritis Healthy Weight for Life" program, pioneered by healthcare and technology company, Prima Health Solutions, and HCF, Australia's largest not-for-profit private health fund, is designed to help treat the symptoms of knee and hip osteoarthritis.

OA is the cause of 97% of all total knee replacements² and 88% of all hip replacements³ making it one of the more costly chronic conditions in Australia. Deloitte Access Economics⁴ estimates the total health cost of OA at \$3.75 billion in 2012 alone.

HCF Medical Director Dr Andrew Cottrill said: "At a time when the rising cost of chronic disease is under the microscope, the Healthy Weight For Life team are able to deliver a program for less than 4% of the cost of a knee replacement.

"For many members it delivers such good symptom improvement that they can delay or even avoid an invasive total joint replacement, which is a far better outcome for the individual member, their GP and the overall healthcare system. We want to make GPs aware that these measurable clinical outcomes can be delivered at scale to large groups of patients across the country," he said.

While weight loss has long been recognised to have a positive impact on a range of health conditions, including OA, it is not often implemented in clinical practice due to challenges such as patient access to a lack of adherence and engagement. Researchers hope the results of the study will transform the way GPs and specialists use weight loss as a treatment for OA.

Professor David Hunter, one of the study authors said: "We feel this large-scale analysis will provide the evidence to help GPs and specialists explain to overweight patients with osteoarthritis that they are prescribing them a therapeutic dose of 5-10% weight loss as a key part of their overall osteoarthritis management. In this context they will be able to discuss the effective dose of weight loss just as they would explain the importance of taking an effective dose of blood pressure medication".

Co-author of the research, and CEO of Prima Health Solutions, Luke Lawler said: "The study proves that therapeutic weight-loss, when provided as part of a world leading osteoarthritis management program, can be achieved cost-effectively and deliver significant measurable clinical outcomes irrespective of where a patient lives.

“Our collaboration with HCF and other private health funds is helping to shift the industry’s approach to chronic disease management towards a value-based framework that delivers measurable health outcomes, rather than funding disconnected services that may not deliver the results patients need.”

Note to editors

Prima Health Solutions began collaborating with HCF to develop the program more than 10 years ago and the Healthy Weight For Life program is now available to eligible members of all the major private health funds, following a simple referral or approval from their GP or treating specialist.

The program is delivered remotely and the innovative model of care links patients with healthcare specialists and support to deliver results, regardless of whether they live in cities or regional locations.

Professor Hunter is a rheumatology clinician researcher whose main research focus has been clinical and translational research in osteoarthritis (OA). He is the Florance and Cope Chair of Rheumatology and Professor of Medicine at University of Sydney and the Royal North Shore Hospital and Consultant Rheumatologist at North Sydney Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Centre. He is ranked as the world’s leading expert in osteoarthritis on Expertscape.com since 2014.

References

1. Is there a dose response relationship between weight loss and symptom improvement in persons with knee osteoarthritis?, Arthritis Care & Research 2016
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acr.22805/abstract>
2. Demographics of Knee Arthroplasty 2014, National Joint Replacement Registry Supplementary Report 2013, Australian Orthopaedic Association.
3. Demographics of Hip Arthroplasty 2014, National Joint Replacement Registry Supplementary Report 2013, Australian Orthopaedic Association.
4. Arthritis and Osteoporosis Victoria (2013). A problem worth solving. Elsternwick: Arthritis and Osteoporosis Victoria. <http://www.arthritisvic.org.au/Research/AOV-Funded-Research/Completed/A-Problem-Worth-Solving/APWS.aspx>

-Ends-

Issued on behalf of HCF by Sefiani Communications Group. Media inquiries to Karen Dunicliff on ph. (02) 8920 0700, mob. 0435 807 761 or kdunicliff@sefiani.com.au.

About HCF

HCF is Australia’s largest not – for –profit health insurer, currently covering more than 1.5 million Australians. To learn more about HCF go to <http://www.hcf.com.au/about-us>

About Prima Health Solutions

PRIMA is a quality certified health care organisation dedicated to the research, development and remote delivery of specialised obesity related chronic disease management and prevention products and programs.

The PRIMA products and services include KicStart™ VLCD, the Integrated Osteoarthritis Management™ program, the Type 2 Diabetes and Heart Healthy Weight for Life™.