

As Ireland prepares for the Springboks, Shane Byrne calls on Irish men to show their commitment, stay healthy...and tackle medical problems head on:

Rugby legend tells Irish men: – *Defend Your Health*

As Ireland makes final preparations to take on mighty South Africa in the Autumn Series a new men's health awareness campaign is urging Irish men to show the same commitment to their health as they do to supporting the boys in green.

Shane Byrne, who won 41 caps for Ireland and helped to bring Irish rugby to a new level in the Triple Crown in 2004 and played in all three Lions tests in 2005, is lining out to encourage male sports fans to mind their health, tackle health problems head-on and not to sidestep their GP. The legendary lineout thrower launched the *Men of Ireland – Defend Your Health* initiative sponsored by Lilly yesterday together with Dr. Michael O'Brien, a Dublin family doctor.

The campaign urges men to *defend their health* by adopting a healthy lifestyle and by taking action early to get help for health problems from their doctor. Men's sexual health is an important part of the picture - erectile problems can affect a man's relationship with his partner and his self esteem and need to be tackled.

Dr O'Brien said that traditionally Irish men tend to be stoic and ignore health problems until they have become severe but that getting early attention for a health problem generally means that treatment is easier and more straightforward. In particular, Dr O'Brien said, erectile difficulties (ED) are among the most common health problems which men avoid talking about to anyone.

He explained that ED is very common, with one man in every two over the age of 40¹ experiencing this kind of problem at some stage but that this was one health issue that rarely got mentioned in the pub after the game or was discussed between even close male friends. Research shows that men who are worried about ED can take almost a year before they go to see their doctor about it² but Irish men need to know that help is available and the earlier a condition is treated, the better the potential outcome.

Shane Byrne, who earned a reputation as one of the most accurate line-out throwers in the world, is encouraging men to focus on their health and tackle any problems head on.

“Irish supporters are among the best sport fans in the world. No one can match their passion and energy, whether following their team to the ends of the earth or turning up in their tens of thousands to cheer the boys on for home games. Our fans will definitely step up to the mark when it comes to motivating the lads against the Springboks”.

¹ Feldman H A *et al. Journal of Urology* 1994, **151**: 54–61.

² Haro JM, Beardsworth A, Casariego J, *et al. Journal of Sexual Medicine* 2006;3: 530-40

“Now it’s time the men of Ireland made the same commitment to defending their health as they do to their team. Many Irish men who experience erectile difficulties or ED do not realise how common it is and are too embarrassed to do anything about it. The good news is, there is help out there and that’s why I’m urging men to tackle the problem. Take action, talk to your GP - and get any problems sorted.” Shane said.

Dr O’Brien added: “Unlike Brian O’Driscoll and his teammates, most of us don’t have the benefit of a medical team monitoring our health each day. It’s easy for men to ignore warning signs and delay doing anything but the reality is, taking action early and seeking help improves the likelihood of straightforward successful treatment of health problems’.

Joan Kelly, Nursing Services Manager, Irish Cancer Society, also encourages men to be proactive about their health and to talk to their GPs about any health concerns. “Particularly as they get older, men need to listen to their bodies and if something is not right, get a check-up from their GP’.

Noel Richardson, Chairman of the Men's Health Forum added that "The Men's Health Forum is delighted to support Lilly's call to men to look after their health - the MHFI policy encourages men to act on any warning signs early and see their GP for advice".

“So, come on guys, get out there, get active, eat a good balanced diet, avoid tobacco and cut down on the drink. If you are not feeling the best, don’t ignore what your body is telling you - be aware of any early warning signs of health problems. If it is erectile difficulties you are worried about - my advice is not to suffer in silence – go to your doctor and get it checked out” Shane Byrne added.

Dr O’Brien added: ‘Irish men need to remember that there is great help available and most problems including erectile difficulties can be treated successfully’.

‘If you're worried about ED or have any concerns about your health, don't delay, tackle it head on, go to your doctor to get checked out and treated’.

For more information on the **Men of Ireland – Defend Your Health** campaign, visit www.defendingyourhealth.com. This campaign, featuring Shane Byrne, will also be aired on national radio during November in the run up to the clash between Ireland and South Africa.

Ends....

For more information contact Andrew Shaw of First Medical Communications on ashaw@firstmedical.ie or 0877 525 445/01 6145102

Talk to a Specialist Nurse if you are concerned about cancer. Call the National Cancer Helpline on Freephone 1 800 200 700 (Monday to Thursday 9am-7pm and Friday 9 ‘til 5pm).

Go to www.manmatters.ie for information and advice about erectile difficulties.

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The Lilly logo is written in a red, cursive script font.