**Parkinson’s UK policy statement: plastic straws**

**What we believe**

Whilst we acknowledge the impact that single use plastic straws have on the environment, we believe that it is imperative that safe and dignified drinking methods are made available to people with Parkinson’s. This includes being able to purchase plastic straws and the provision of plastic straws in local businesses, hospitals and care homes, until suitable alternatives are widely available.

Currently there is no widespread availability of suitable alternatives and, as such, we believe that plastic straws must continue to be available to people with Parkinson’s until such alternatives are widely available.

We would urge businesses, hospitals and care homes to provide people with Parkinson’s with plastic straws. Furthermore, we would encourage developers to continue to make advancements in drinking aids for people with Parkinson’s and dysphagia.

**Why we believe this:**

In April 2018, the Government outlined plans to ban single-use plastic items, such as plastic straws, in an attempt to tackle plastic waste and to reduce environmental impact.

However, some people with Parkinson’s experience dysphagia (eating, swallowing and saliva control problems) and the use of straws is sometimes a necessary technique to enable them to continue to drink safely. Until now, the widespread availability of straws has meant that people with Parkinson’s have had access straws with ease, both to purchase and as patrons in businesses.

If the plastic straw ban goes ahead, there is concern that those that need them most, will not be able to access them for use both inside and outside of their home.

**What’s the evidence:**

We asked our patient-led Policy Panel, health professionals and supporters via social media to let us know their thoughts on this issue.

Supporters fed-back via social media that they are aware of the alternatives available, which many told us they already use. We do acknowledge, however, that many people that will be most affected by this ban may be more difficult to reach.

Whilst we acknowledge that there are alternatives to plastic straws that many of our supporters already make use of, we know that these are not suitable for everyone with Parkinson’s. Health professionals have shared their concerns with us around the safety of reusable and paper straws. Reusable straws can be unhygienic if not properly cleaned and disposable paper straws can be a choking hazard as they disintegrate, particularly in hot drinks.

Policy Panel members were similarly concerned that those most vulnerable need access to safe drinking methods.

**Acknowledgement**

We are grateful for the advice and guidance of our Policy Panel in shaping this position paper on prescription charges. The Policy Panel consists of people with experience of Parkinson's who meet on a regular basis to help guide the charity's position on a range of policy issues**.**

**Further information**

Please contact the Policy and Campaign team. Tel: 020 7963 9349 or email: campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk

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