

The newsletter of the ASCEND Study

Summer 2011 – Number 9



Welcome to the ninth edition of **HIMALAYA** – the newsletter of the ASCEND study. Thank you very much for your interest and participation in this study so far. If you have not received **HIMALAYA** before, we hope this newsletter will educate and entertain you, and tell you more about the study that you are playing such a vital role in. If you have, then read on and find out what we have been up to since the last issue.

The picture on the left shows **Nanga Parbat** which is the 9th highest mountain of the world (26,660 ft). It forms the western anchor of the Himalayan Range and is the westernmost eight-thousander. Worth the climb - great views from the top!

ASCEND recruitment completed

With your help, ASCEND is making excellent progress. You may remember that the initial plan was to recruit 10,000 participants, but we are delighted to say that we have now enrolled our 15,000th member! In fact, our final total is 15,481 people recruited. This newsletter is to update you on progress and about some changes to the study. For ASCEND to give a reliable answer about the balance of benefits and risk of taking the treatments, we need to increase both the number of people taking part and also the length of the study.



The Steering Committee, which has overall responsibility for running the project, has also asked if participants could, on average, take their study treatment for at least 7 years. This means that ASCEND will continue until the middle of 2017. Once again, this will make our findings even more robust, so we do hope that as many of you as possible will be happy to help in this way. Our goal is to provide reliable answers to some very important medical questions for millions of people around the world with diabetes.

What happens next...

We are very grateful to you for playing such a vital role in helping us try to improve the health of the millions of people around the world with diabetes. The answers we get from ASCEND will help doctors understand whether aspirin and fish oils help people with diabetes. That's why it is so important that we send you the follow-up forms every six months – and we're very grateful to you for taking the time and trouble to fill them in.

The sections about your current medication, and other serious illnesses or hospital admissions you have had, are key. If a doctor does start you on one

of the drugs mentioned on the form please do call on the Freephone number below to discuss it. If you have had any illness needing hospital admission, please let us know on the form in Sections 4 & 5.

For ASCEND to deliver all that it can, we need as many of you as possible to take your study treatments. We also need you to complete your questionnaires. In this way we know how you are getting along. This is true even if you are no longer taking the study treatments – as the more complete a picture we have, the more reliable our results will be.

Where can people find out more?

They can:



visit the ASCEND website: www.ctsuo.ox.ac.uk/ascend



call a member of the study team: (Freephone) 0800 585323

THE ASCEND TEAM



You may have read in previous newsletters about different members of the team. Professor Jane Armitage, the chief investigator of the ASCEND trial, has worked at Oxford University since 1990 and is very well known for her work on “statins” (which many of you take) as she was instrumental in large trials which have contributed significantly to our knowledge of them and how effective they are. You have also received letters from her at different stages of ASCEND. She made a 10-day trek to Annapurna Sanctuary in the Himalayas and the photo opposite shows her standing in front of a mountain called *Machapuchare* (also known as “Fish Tail”). She reached the Sanctuary when the ASCEND recruitment was just reaching its summit!

15,000th Participant: David's big lift for ASCEND

At the end of June, ASCEND registered its 15,000th participant, David Howarth, from Lancaster. David, 64, married and a father of five, has been a long distance lorry driver and gas fitter, but 17 years ago became a porter at Lancaster University. He loves the job, working in one of its nine colleges, which has 600 residents. He particularly enjoys meeting a wide variety of interesting people in the course of his work.

Like all ASCEND participants, David has diabetes. He was diagnosed some 25 years ago but has continued to live a highly active life. One of his leisure activities indicates just how fit he keeps himself: he is a weight lifter, specialising in deadlifting (lifting weights from floor to waist height) and bench press, and is dedicated to a strict routine of training and competitions. He has held a number of records, including two silver medals won while competing in Europe. The most recent was bagged in 2010, in the masters class (over 60 years of age, bodyweight 100kg) when he deadlifted 232.5 kg, a record that still stands.

Despite working a shift system, including night shifts, as well as weight training three times per week and taking part in championships, David finds time for gardening, D-I-Y and regular days out walking in the nearby Lake District. He and his wife Doreen go there at every opportunity with their Patterdale terrier, Nip.

When we spoke to David, he was eagerly anticipating the opening in August of a new £20 million sports centre at the university, and by the time you read this, it is likely that he will be making full use of it. We wish him and Doreen many more years of healthy, happy life.



Uncertainty about Aspirin and Diabetes

Media reports of both the possible benefits and dangers of taking aspirin have caused some confusion for people in ASCEND. These reports highlight the real uncertainty among doctors about whether otherwise healthy people with diabetes should take aspirin or not. With your

help, ASCEND will try to provide clear answers, and make a major contribution to the treatment of the 300 million people with diabetes in the world for many years to come. Thank you for your commitment and continued participation in this important health study.



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ASCEND is coordinated by the *Clinical Trial Service Unit* of the *University of Oxford*



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