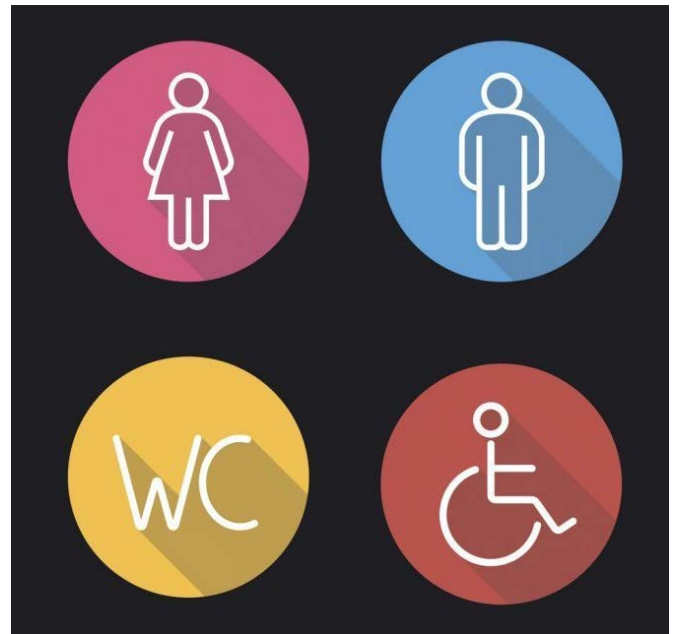


NOW IS THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT – BLADDER PROBLEMS IN PD

By Dr Jon Stamford

On the whole, the Parkinson's community does not look to royalty for pertinent lifestyle advice. Although we learn tricks of the trade as we go along on our journey with Parkinson's, and we readily share these tips with fellow people living with Parkinson's, crowned heads rarely contribute.

Henry V gave us (well, according to Shakespeare) "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; Or close the wall up with our English dead!"



Magnificent certainly but hardly relevant to the average PWP.

Richard III would have us believe that "now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this son of York". Again, memorable but not helpful. And to the modern ear, let's be honest, not desperately intelligible.

We have to wait until Edward VIII, that most controversial of 20th-century monarchs, for any meaningful advice. It is perhaps ironic that the feeblest of kings should be the most practical. Edward VIII is mostly remembered, apart from that business with the American divorcee, for a single quotation – "never miss an opportunity to relieve yourself".

Now this may not speak of mediaeval heroism or Machiavellian plotting but it is of more direct relevance to people with Parkinson's than anything the Plantagenets, Tudors and Stuarts could collectively offer.

Okay, I apologise for the apparent diversion through mediaeval history but I want to raise a delicate matter. I want to talk about bladder control. And the reason I want to talk about it is very simple – because most of us don't.

That's right, it's one of the least discussed symptoms of Parkinson's but one that has huge bearing on quality of life. Many people with Parkinson's, especially as the condition advances, have bladder problems and yet many of those soldier on without seeking help.

Bladder problems might mean not going out for fear of being caught short. They mean keeping one eye on how much one drinks. They might mean keeping a spare pair of underpants with you. They mean explanations and embarrassment all round. They mean never missing an opportunity to relieve oneself. And they definitely mean an increasing sense of isolation.

But all of this is because of embarrassment. We are reluctant to discuss our problems with family, friends and certainly not with our GP. We suffer in silence, perhaps somehow convinced that we are the only ones going through this private hell.

And that's where you're wrong. Estimates vary but around half of us suffer from bladder problems of some degree. Whatever way you look at it, that's a lot of people. And more to the point, it's a lot of people whose lives are being unnecessarily restricted by something that can be treated.

I have had Parkinson's for a decade now and, particularly over the last three or four years, have noticed my bladder control getting progressively worse. It's embarrassing, it's inhibiting and it's dispiriting. More than that, symptoms are often worsened by the cold weather of winter.

But it's also treatable. There are medications and other treatments which can help. And although I am a Yorkshireman and therefore trained to suffer in silence (!), I don't suffer this in silence.

There I've said it. And although I cannot claim to turn winter to glorious summer, even as a son of York, it's worth knowing. So if you experience bladder problems remember this – you are not alone and you can be treated effectively. Parkinson's is a tough gig as it stands.

Don't make it tougher by turning a blind eye to things that can be helped.

The message here is simple – talk to your GP, talk to your nurse, talk to your neurologist, talk to other PWPs. It doesn't matter which. But for goodness sake, talk to someone.