

# PPEP Talk - Endometriosis Program for Schools

By David Knuckey

**Beginning in term 2, the Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia (PPFA) will deliver its 'Periods, Pain, Endometriosis Program' (PPEP Talk) to high schools in South Australia.**

PPEP Talk is an interactive program that de-mystifies periods and pain. It supports the 1 in 5 girls with a significant period pain problem and empowers all students to more comfortably discuss menstruation.

In July 2018, the Federal Minister for Health, launched the National Action Plan for Endometriosis, with a strong focus on community awareness, education, improved clinical services and research to address the lack of attention that Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain has received.

The National Action Plan includes specific mention of the need for schools education in period pain and endometriosis. A schools program has been identified as one of 3 major priorities with early diagnosis a major priority for the health of the next generation of Australians.

The Federal Government has agreed to co-fund a SA schools program administered through the Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia.

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## What Is Endometriosis?

Endometriosis is a common condition affecting around 5 or 10 in 100 women. It can cause pain, scarring and sometimes trouble getting pregnant.

The lining of the uterus is called the Endometrium. This is the tissue that grows inside the uterus each month and bleeds away with a period. When tissue like this

is found in other areas around the pelvis, not just inside the uterus, it is called Endometriosis. The areas of endometriosis are called lesions.

Endometriosis lesions form a spotty covering on the sidewalls of the pelvis, or on the surface of the pelvic organs. More severe endometriosis grows into the pelvic organs themselves or forms round 'cysts' in the ovaries.

Most endometriosis lesions can't be seen on an ultrasound scan. Endometriosis is a pain you can see at a laparoscopy, but often it is only one part of pelvic pain. Many girls and women with endometriosis have a mix of different symptoms, not just period pain.

Many women with pelvic pain have endometriosis, or have had endometriosis in the past. However the amount of endometriosis doesn't fit well with the amount of pain. So, you can have severe endometriosis but no pain – or you can have mild endometriosis and lots of pain.

- An estimated 500,000 women and girls in Australia live with endometriosis, with 2/3 of these women describing symptoms that began in their teens.

- Women with endometriosis lose 11 hours per week of workplace productivity.

- 26% of teenage girls in a recent Canberra study had missed school because of their period. Of these, 2 per cent reported time off school with every single period.

- Direct costs for endometriosis in Australia were estimated at \$6.6 billion

in 2011. The savings could be in the order of \$3.3 billion.

- The price of missed opportunities in life for these girls and women is immeasurable.

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It currently takes an average of 7 years to diagnose. This is possibly because of a lack of knowledge, research and resources around the condition. There are a few ways to treat endometriosis, such as hormone treatment. The earlier it is detected the better the outcome. That's why we designed the course.

## What Is A PPEP Talk?

PPEP Talk is a one hour interactive, fun-based program that seeks to educate and inform students about period pain and how to manage it, as well as how to recognise when the pain might be out of the ordinary.

It has a focus on health, wellbeing and empowering young people. The program includes an opportunity for girls with pain and their teachers to discuss their personal situation with the educator after the presentation.

It includes resources for girls who wish to discuss their pain further with their parents, and a book on Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain for their school library.

Boys are welcome to join the talk. Boys will be the partners, friends, colleagues, brothers, fathers, bosses etc of women living with endometriosis so it's important to educate them as well.



The PPEP Talks program was put together by Libby Parker and Dr. Susan Evans. Libby is a teacher and a journalist and serves on the board of directors at PPFA.

Libby first presented with endometriosis symptoms at 14 and was misdiagnosed until she was 36. She has suffered fertility issues and chronic pain since and is passionate about making sure girls are armed with information to ensure they can best advise their GP of any unusual pain or symptoms.

Dr. Evans is a surgeon and author of the book, 'Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain'.

PPEP Talks aim to reduce school absenteeism and reduce the time to diagnose endometriosis. This has been demonstrated in New Zealand where a school program has been offered for over 20 years.

### **PPEP Talk In Your School**

To arrange for PPEP Talk to come to your school simply email [ppeptalk@pelvicpain.org.au](mailto:ppeptalk@pelvicpain.org.au)

They can work with small groups or a whole year level. In year one, the presentation directed to year 10s. Whether boys are involved is up to the school.

The program aims to deliver the PPEP Talks to 80 South Australian secondary and combined secondary schools within the Adelaide metropolitan area in the first 12 months.

The aim is then to extend the program to make it available to all SA Schools in future years. ■

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