

MRS PARKER-BOWLES

Your Majesty. Ladies and Gentlemen. I became involved with osteoporosis after my grandmother and my mother both tragically died as a result of this crippling disease. My Mother was only 72. Then, only 8 years ago, osteoporosis was seldom discussed, rarely diagnosed and usually attributed to old women with so called “dowagers humps”. My family knew nothing about osteoporosis. The local GP was kind and sympathetic but he, like us, was able to do little to alleviate the terrible pain my mother suffered so stoically. We watched in horror as she quite literally shrunk in front of our eyes. She lost about 8 inches in height and became so bent that she was unable to digest her food properly, leaving her with no appetite at all.

In her latter years she could not breathe without oxygen or even totter round her beloved garden on her zimmer frame. I believe, ladies and gentlemen, that the quality of her life became so dismal and her suffering so unbearable that she just gave up the fight and lost the will to live.

As a result of my Mother’s death, I became determined to find some way of helping people with osteoporosis from experiencing the same fate and general disregard that she encountered. I was lucky enough to discover on my doorstep the National Osteoporosis Society, a relatively new and small charity, piloted by the indomitable Linda Edwards. I went to visit them at their headquarters near Bath. I was so impressed by the dedication of their staff in helping both sufferers and their families and the research they were doing in the field of osteoporosis that I offered to help them in any way I could. Bravely they took up my offer.

As a Patron and now as President of the Osteoporosis Society I have had the chance to see for myself the wonderful care given to patients and I believe, exceptional ground-breaking research being carried out in hospitals all over Britain. On these visits we try and target local health authorities to encourage them to give more funding to osteoporosis. I am happy to report that with a bit of gentle nudging we have had a certain amount of success. But, as all of you here today know, we have a long, long way to go. There are not enough DEXA scanners, not enough staff to monitor, not enough physiotherapists, or special nurses, or money to help fund the vital research into osteoporosis itself.

So it is imperative that all of us at this IOF conference today, get this message across to our Governments and health authorities, by whatever means we can. We must emphasise the importance for spending more money on early diagnosis, which is not just a huge saving in bone fractures alone, but could prevent the suffering my mother, grand-mother and thousands of people world-wide have, and had to endure.

Thank you.