

## **Parkinson's Disease**

April has been designated as Parkinson's Disease Awareness Month by the Parkinson's Disease Foundation. Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurological disorder that affects nearly one million people in the US. Although promising research is being conducted, there is currently no cure for or definitive cause of Parkinson's disease.

- Approximately 60,000 Americans are diagnosed with Parkinson's disease each year, and this number does not reflect the thousands of cases that go undetected.
- Seven to 10 million people worldwide are estimated to be living with Parkinson's disease.
- Incidence of Parkinson's increases with age, but an estimated four percent of people with Parkinson's are diagnosed before the age of 50.

### **About Parkinson's Disease**

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a chronic and progressive movement disorder, meaning that symptoms continue and worsen over time. The cause is unknown, but there are treatment options such as medication and surgery to manage its symptoms.

Parkinson's involves the malfunction and death of vital nerve cells in the brain, called neurons. Parkinson's primarily affects neurons in an area of the brain called the substantia nigra. Some of these dying neurons produce dopamine, a chemical that sends messages to the part of the brain that controls movement and coordination. As PD progresses, the amount of dopamine produced in the brain decreases, leaving a person unable to control movement normally.

The specific group of symptoms that an individual experiences varies from person to person. Primary motor signs of Parkinson's disease include the following.

- **tremor** of the hands, arms, legs, jaw and face
- **bradykinesia** or slowness of movement
- **rigidity** or stiffness of the limbs and trunk
- **postural instability** or impaired balance and coordination

### **Rock Steady Boxing**

One organization using a novel approach to help combat the symptoms of Parkinson's is Rock Steady Boxing. Rock Steady Boxing (RSB) is a first-of-its-kind, Indianapolis-based nonprofit gym founded in 2006 to provide an effective form of physical exercise to people who are living with Parkinson's. Though it may seem surprising, this non-contact boxing-inspired fitness routine is dramatically improving the ability of people with Parkinson's to live independent lives.

RSB was founded in 2006 by former Marion County (Indiana) prosecutor Scott C. Newman, who was diagnosed with early-onset Parkinson's disease at age 40. A few years after his diagnosis, Newman began intense, one-on-one boxing training and witnessed the dramatic improvement in his physical health, agility and daily functioning through the intense and high energy workouts. Rock Steady's first home was in the donated corner of a corporate employee gym, and in 2011, moved to its own custom-built boxing gym. At the gym in Indianapolis, 17 classes are offered each week, serving more than 160 people with PD. Rock Steady is primarily funded by individual donations and receives no government support. In the last year, RSB has established affiliates in 11 states and three countries – Canada, Australia and Italy. Our own founding attorney, Scott R. Severns, sits on the board of this organization and has been known to try his hand in their boxing arena as well.

RSB enables people with Parkinson's disease to fight the disease by providing a fitness program that improves their quality of life, sense of efficacy and self-worth. Recent studies also suggest that intense exercise programs such as non-contact boxing may be “neuro-protective,” actually working to delay the progression of symptoms. RSB provides encouragement through a “tough love” approach, inspiring maximum effort, speed, strength, balance and flexibility. Boxing works by moving your body in all planes of motion while continuously changing the routine as you progress through the workout. RSB classes have proven that anyone, at any level of Parkinson's, can actually lessen their symptoms and lead a healthier and happier life.

### **Assistance with Parkinson's Disease**

There are many medical resources available to help treat Parkinson's disease. Patients and caregivers make many trips to neurologists, physical therapists, and other medical providers, with increasing frequency as the condition progresses. However, one of the most overlooked resources in dealing with this disease is legal counsel. As an elder law firm, our attorneys are specially trained to deal with the legal issues that arise from this diagnosis, such as Health Care Powers of Attorney, Special Needs Trusts, planning for long-term care issues, and general estate planning. Please contact our firm to set up a meeting with one of our attorneys for more information about how legal planning can make a difference for a Parkinson's patient.