

# New social experiment by Novartis encourages Singaporeans to #StartAskin' to get clear about psoriasis

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- It is estimated that 40,000 Singaporeans are living with psoriasis - one of the top ten most common skin conditions in the world. However, public awareness remains low in the city-state.
- A social experiment was conducted to test Singaporeans' attitudes towards the skin condition, and call for more conversations to enhance understanding of the disease and treatments available

**Singapore, November 8, 2018** – Novartis today released the video of their new social experiment testing reactions and attitudes of people in Singapore when they interact with someone living with psoriasis.

Ranked as one of the top ten most common skin conditions in the world, psoriasis affects about 1% of the local population, with 40,000 Singaporeans<sup>1</sup> living with it. However, public awareness of the condition remains low in the city-state. A recent survey conducted by The Psoriasis Association of Singapore (PAS) in October 2017 revealed that 44.5% of respondents have low awareness of the condition, such as its correlation with the immune system, the availability of treatment options and the fact that it is not contagious.

To help bring psoriasis in the spotlight, Novartis consulted with The Psoriasis Association of Singapore (PAS-) to set up a social experiment highlighting some of the real day-to-day encounters and social stigma faced by Singaporeans coping with psoriasis. The social experiment involving seven participants at a food-tasting event, had a volunteer made up to resemble a person suffering from psoriasis to test the reaction and attitudes towards the condition in a social setting. The participants, who did not know that the food-tasting event they were attending was actually a social experiment, showed their raw reactions of concern, fear and uneasiness towards psoriasis in the video. However, no one discussed about the condition until the acting psoriasis patient left the table – a common uncomfortable encounter faced by those suffering from psoriasis in Singapore.

"The impact of psoriasis is more than skin deep and can have a profound effect on a person's health and emotional wellbeing. Our interactions with psoriasis patients revealed that the reluctance to speak about this skin condition in our society often contributes to social alienation and misconceptions about it. We hope the experiment will encourage Singaporeans to start much needed conversations around psoriasis. Such discussions will not only facilitate better understanding of the condition but also encourage patients to start asking for treatments available. Achieving clear skin is now an attainable treatment goal that can improve the health and quality of life for people with psoriasis," said Celine Landie, Managing Director, Novartis Singapore.

In an international study, over 8,300 people with moderate-to-severe psoriasis across 31 countries found that, on average, patients tried four different treatments and needed to see three different medical professionals before achieving clear skin. Furthermore, for nearly 30% of patients this translated into over half a decade-long wait to identify an efficacious treatment post-diagnosis. Of the 43% of respondents who confirmed they were able to achieve clear or almost clear skin, more than half had not previously believed this was a realistic and

attainable treatment goal.

“Psoriasis is not simply a cosmetic problem, but a persistent, long-lasting, and often distressing disease, which can affect even the simplest aspects of people's daily lives. People with psoriasis are at risk of developing psoriatic arthritis which can cause inflammation or other permanent damage in patients' joints. The PAS is happy to support this social experiment initiative which highlights the day-to-day social stigma faced by patients,” said Dr. Colin Theng, President of PAS.

The video and social experiment is part of the Novartis #StartAskin' campaign which aims to raise awareness about psoriasis with a dedicated Facebook page providing information and tips of coping with the condition and a series of online videos aimed at debunking common myths and misconceptions about psoriasis. #StartAskin' also aims to establish a platform where patients and families affected by psoriasis, and other related complications, would feel empowered by the information hosted in the Facebook page, and the opportunity to connect with other patients living with the same condition.

“We strive to improve patients' lives by listening to them and working with the community to challenge the status quo. The #StartAskin' campaign marks our commitment to fight the stigma and ignorance associated with psoriasis and advance patient care. We hope that #StartAskin' will break the wall of silence about the condition, thereby achieving greater awareness as well as more understanding of people living with psoriasis,” added Ms. Landie.

To find out more about the #StartAskin' awareness campaign visit  
<https://www.facebook.com/StartAskinForClearSkin>

## **About psoriasis**

Psoriasis is a chronic, noncommunicable, painful, disfiguring and disabling disease for which there is no cure and with great negative impact on patients' quality of life. The reported prevalence of psoriasis in countries ranges between 0.09% and 11.4%, making psoriasis a serious global problem.

Psoriasis involves the skin and nails, and is associated with a number of comorbidities. Skin lesions are localized or generalized, mostly symmetrical, sharply demarcated, red papules and plaques, and usually covered with white or silver scales. Lesions cause itching, stinging and pain. Between 1.3% and 34.7% of individuals with psoriasis develop chronic, inflammatory arthritis (psoriatic arthritis) that leads to joint deformations and disability.<sup>4</sup>

## **About The Psoriasis Association of Singapore**

The Psoriasis Association of Singapore (PAS) is a non-profitable organisation formed in 1982 with the encouragement and support from the late Professor V.S.Rajan. Since then, the Association is run by volunteers who are either Psoriasis patients or relatives of patient, professionals, nurses/staff and social workers from National Skin Centre. Doctors from National Skin Centre and from the private sectors are invited to be Medical Consultants. The Association has also received much support from members of the dermatology profession and the Dermatology Society of Singapore.

PAS's objective to disseminate medical information and support to a group of members who are suffering from the chronic skin condition. It is an avenue for patients to meet to discuss and exchange ideas on how to cope on living with psoriasis. It aims to foster co-ordination and development of all activities in relation to psoriasis. And to promote the study of the causes and treatment of psoriasis and to disseminate medical information concerning psoriasis. For more information, please visit <http://www.psoriasis.org.sg>

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## References

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3. Patient perceptions of clear/almost clear skin in moderate-to-severe plaque psoriasis: results of the Clear About Psoriasis worldwide survey. Armstrong et al. 2018
4. Global report on psoriasis. World Health Organization, 2016.

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