**Immediate Release: 8th March 2018**

**A FIRST FOR IRISH DEMENTIA DAY CARE AS THE ALZHEIMER SOCIETY OF IRELAND INTRODUCES PARO THE THERAPEUTIC ROBOT TO PERSONS WITH DEMENTIA.**

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) is delighted to announce the arrival of Paro the baby seal, an advanced interactive therapeutic robot.

The ASI is the first organisation to deploy Paro in a Day Care setting in Ireland and will be based at The Orchard Day Care Centre in Blackrock, Co Dublin to be used with ASI clients and service users.

Paro is an advanced interactive therapeutic robot and registered medical device. Paro is unique and is proven to reduce stress, increase socialisation, stimulate interaction and improve relaxation and motivation for people with dementia.

Dr Takanori Shibata the Japanese inventor of Paro and Abdul Jahangir from Sense Medical in the UK the supplier of Paro delivered training to ASI staff at The Orchard earlier this month with great results.

Researchers, Dr Perry Share and Dr John Pender of Sligo IT, will research the impact of Paro on people with dementia and staff in The Orchard. Their research will seek to measure the impact of Paro on peoples' well-being and on staff perceptions of using robotics in care delivery.

The purchase of Paro was made possible by a charity donation received from the Hospital Saturday Fund to the ASI.

**Inventor of Paro Dr Takanori Shibata said,**  “ I was overwhelmed to see a charming lady with dementia interacting with PARO at The Orchard Day Care Centre of the Alzheimer Society of Ireland.I was  glad to see that she hugged and kissed to PARO with beautiful smile, and communicated with other people. I hope PARO will be accepted well by elderly with dementia at the centre, and make them relaxed and happier”.

**ASI Training Manager Fergus Timmons said**, "We are excited to bring Paro to Ireland for the first time. He will help us with the delivery of person centred care which is a core principle of The Alzheimer Society of Ireland. It is important the we explore the benefits of new and innovative technology to support our service delivery, and we look forward to assessing the impact of Paro on our care delivery in The Orchard".

**Manager of Orchard Day Care Mary Hickey said,** “We are thrilled to welcome Paro to the Orchard who is going to be a great addition to our team and enhancement of our services. Paro has already brought so many smiles on faces and we look forward to the positive impact Paro will have on our clients and our team alike”.

**Sales and Marketing Director, Sense Medical Ltd, Abdul Jahangir said,** “We are delighted that we could offer this innovative technology to The Alzheimer Society of Ireland who do amazing work in helping people live with Alzheimer’s and Dementia.Paro can offer the comfort of pet therapy where a living animal can become difficult and overcomes other issues related with infection control, Paro has proven to improve people’s quality of life”.

**ENDS**

**For more information contact The Alzheimer Society of Ireland Communications Officer Lisa Gernon on 086 029 5634 or** **lisa.gernon@alzheimer.ie**

**About Paro**

Paro is an advanced interactive robot developed a leading Japanese automation pioneer. Paro is has big black eyes that open, close, and follow your movements. It is about the size of a large cat, and when you pick it up, it is heavier than you might expect. It charges by sucking on an electric pacifier. Inside its fuzzy, white exterior, the seal has sensors that detect touch, sound, light, heat, and movement, and it reacts in different ways. It can recognize its own name.

**Benefits of Paro**

PARO has been designed for people with dementia or similar loss of cognitive function, caused by stroke or traumatic brain injury, and the role of Paro is to provide comfort. Paro has numerous documented benefits:

* Reduce patient stress and their caregivers
* Stimulates interaction between patients and caregivers
* Improves relaxation and motivation
* Improves the socialisation of patients with each other and with caregivers

There is a large body of evidence to show that interacting with animals can help things like lower blood pressure, reduce depression, reduce subjective pain, decrease the time it takes to recover from chronic ailments

**How Paro Works:**

Paro has five kinds of sensors: tactile, light, audition, temperature, and posture sensors, with which it can perceive people and its environment.

With the light sensor, Paro can recognise light and dark. He feels being stroked and beaten by tactile sensor, or being held by the posture sensor. Paro can also recognise the direction of voice and words such as its name, greetings, and praise with its audio sensor.

Paro can learn to behave in a way that the user prefers, and to respond to its new name. For example, if you stroke it every time you touch it, Paro will remember your previous action and try to repeat that action to be stroked. If you hit it, Paro remembers its previous action and tries not to do that action.

By interaction with people, Paro responds as if it is alive, moving its head and legs, making sounds, and showing your preferred behaviour. Paro also imitates the voice of a real baby harp seal.

**About The Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI):**

The ASI is the national leader in advocating for and providing dementia-specific supports and services and each year the organisation provides more than one million hours of community-based dementia-specific care throughout Ireland.

**The ASI provides the following services:**

* National Helpline
* Social Clubs
* Support Groups
* Day Care Services
* Home Care
* Dementia Advisor Service
* Mobile Information Bus

**Helpline:** The Alzheimer Society of Ireland National Helpline is open six days a week Monday to Friday 10am–5pm and Saturday 10am–4pm on 1800 341 341.

**About Dementia:**

* The number of people with dementia in Ireland is expected to more than double over the next 20 years, from 55,000 today to 113,000 in 2036.
* Dementia is progressive. There is currently no cure. Dementia is not simply a health issue but a social issue that requires a community response.
* Each year over 4,000 people develop dementia. That’s at least 11 people every day and anyone can get dementia – even people in their 30s/40s/50s.
* The overall cost of dementia care in Ireland is just over €1.69 billion per annum; 48% of this is attributable to family care; 43% is accounted for by residential care; formal health and social care services contribute only 9% to the total cost.
* The Alzheimer Society of Ireland National Helpline is open six days a week Monday to Friday 10am–5pm and Saturday 10am–4pm on 1800 341 341.

Figures referenced to Cahill, S. & Pierce, M. (2013) *The Prevalence of Dementia in Ireland*