

Press Release

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Nerve block injections offer new hope to migraine sufferers

Migraine sufferers in the west now have access to improved treatment for this debilitating condition at the Royal United Hospital.

RUH neurologist Doctor Nicola Giffin (who has a special interest in headaches) developed an expertise in nerve block injections whilst training at the National Hospital for Neurology in London and is seeing patients from as far away as Wales and Hereford.

The injections – a mixture of steroid and local anaesthetic - are given to patients who suffer from either migraine or cluster headaches. They are injected in the occipital nerve which is behind the ear, and patients can receive relief from their headache pain for up to a month.

Doctor Giffin says: “An occipital nerve injection can be useful for people who have frequent, even daily, headaches that have not responded to conventional medication. The injection is quick and easy to perform. It gives relief from headaches for about half of patients. It is uncertain exactly how the injection works but it probably acts on centres in the ‘brainstem’, damping down pain signals from nerves from the parts of the head where the headache is felt.”

The injection is usually used in conjunction with other medical treatments. Doctor Giffin says it’s a complex condition to treat: “Most people with occasional migraine get good relief from the headache with simple ‘over-the-counter’ remedies, such as soluble aspirin, but patients with frequent or severe migraines need prescription medication taken on a daily basis to prevent the debilitating attacks. Because this medication may have side-effects it should be tailored to an individual taking into account other health problems and the patient’s life-style.”

One patient who believes the injections are working for her is 54 year old Christine Prince from Southdown. She has suffered with migraines on and off since she was a teenager, but found they got much worse once she entered her forties. At one point she was getting the headaches three to four times a week: “I could be totally out of it for up to five days, all I could do was lie down – they were completely ruining my life. It’s a pain you can’t describe – it affects your whole body and you feel sick and just want to bang your head to make it go away.”

She’s seen an improvement in her condition since her referral to Doctor Giffin’s headache clinic in 2005. As well as being given medication to help prevent the migraines, she has had several nerve block injections which, although she found painful at the time, have changed her life for the better.

“The relief I’ve got from the injections has basically given me some of my life back – because I was so trapped before. I felt I couldn’t go out and have a social life in case I got a migraine, and holidays were difficult also..... I’ve gone from having 3 or 4

headaches a week to just 2 or 3 per month - It's been fantastic, Doctor Giffin is superb."

Ends

Issued by: Brigid Devlin Communications Dept. Tel 01225 825849

Doctor Giffin a/v for interview tomorrow Dec 5th.

Christine Prince happy to be interviewed. Please contact RUH for her no.

Notes to editors

- RUH Neurologists saw 2500 outpatients last year and about 25% were for headache
- Migraine is thought to affect 15 % of the population
- Two-thirds of sufferers are women.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) regards migraine to be in the top 20 most disabling chronic disorders
- An estimated 190,000 attacks occur every day in UK.
- Whilst migraine can occur in childhood and the elderly, it is most troublesome in the productive years (teens to mid-50s) and as a result, over 100,000 are absent from work or school every day because of their migraine in the UK.

There are 2 types of migraine:

Migraine without aura

- Consists of a severe, throbbing headache, usually located on one side, with abdominal symptoms including loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting,
- Sufferers may also experience sensitivity to smell, light and noise, which leads them to rest in a darkened, quiet room.
- Attacks usually last 4-72 hours and sufferers usually feel washed out for other one or two days afterwards. The average no of attacks per sufferer is 13 per year
- Many patients also have poor concentration, clumsiness and difficulty with their speech during the attack

Migraine with aura

The headache is preceded by visual disturbances such as flashing lights, zig zag lines and blind spots, or symptoms on one side of the body such as tingling in the limbs or weakness. lasting between 5 and 60 minutes

Useful organisations

Migraine Assoc helpline 01932 352468

Migraine Trust 0207 4361336