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From the Pump Room to a Pump Clinic, Diabetes patients in Bath benefit

Diabetes patients at the RUH in Bath are singing the praises of a treatment which can help regulate their condition as part of Diabetes Awareness Week (15 - 21 June 2009)

The specialist treatment, an insulin pump, works by delivering measured doses of insulin through a layer of tissue just beneath the skin, replacing a demanding regimen of up to four injections every day.

Dr Alexandra Ward, consultant in diabetes at the RUH, says "A pump can make a huge difference to patients with type 1 diabetes. We have patients who are very motivated and look after their condition, but experience frequent low blood sugars - hypoglycaemic attacks or hypos."

"Our pump clinic has seen some great success stories with patients whose lives have been turned around thanks to this new equipment."

Type 1 diabetes develops if the body is unable to produce any insulin; however insulin is essential to keep blood glucose levels under control. For most patients with Type 1 diabetes, insulin regimens are based on long-acting insulin combined with a smaller amount of faster-acting insulin at mealtimes, all normally taken via injections every day.

The pump works by delivering a very small but continuous supply of fast-acting insulin in place of long-acting insulin, day and night. This allows the patient to tailor the dose to their needs at different times of the day. Additional insulin is still needed to cover meals, but this can be calculated and administered more easily with the help of the pump.

Diabetes Specialist Nurse Sally Wylie has been helping patients to make the transition to a pump. "The insulin in a pump is fast acting so the dose can be changed quickly and easily to try and prevent a hypo, for example if the patient suddenly needs to do more exercise than usual."

The pumps are the size of an average mobile phone and they can easily clip to a waistband. They run on batteries and have safety features to warn if the power or insulin level is running low.

Jayne Cresswell from Bath has been managing diabetes for 13 years. "I was diagnosed when I was 19 and at university and I had to make huge changes to my lifestyle. But over the past few years I've been getting frustrated by my lack of control; despite being really careful I was still having hypos. It turned out I was having hypos every night but my body

wasn't recognising the signs and I woke up each morning feeling dreadful, like a hangover."

"I was fitted for a pump eight months ago and it's been brilliant. It took time to get used to and you have to be motivated but it's made a big difference to my life and now I can wake up refreshed from a good night's sleep."

"To begin with I was really worried that people would notice the pump and my main concern was vanity but it can be really discreet, I tuck the pump under my clothes and carry on as normal. I'd say to any woman out there who may be worried about how they look that the quality of life after getting a pump far outweighs any concerns."

"I'm still diabetic and things still go wrong but having the pump has really revolutionised my life."

Dr Ward adds "Insulin pump therapy is not suitable for everyone but for those patients who meet the criteria, it can revolutionise their lives. At the moment we are expanding the pump clinic so that we can offer pumps to everyone who is likely to benefit."

Last year the National Institute for Health and Clinical Effectiveness (NICE) recommended insulin pumps as a clinically and cost-effective treatment option where certain criteria are met.

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