



Healthcare in Canada » Health News

CTV program W5 reports on radical and experimental MS treatment

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TORONTO -- CTV's current affairs program *W5* aired a segment Saturday about research into a potentially promising but highly experimental treatment for multiple sclerosis.

The treatment involves a radical and so far unproven surgical procedure developed by Italian vascular surgeon Dr. Paolo Zamboni, which is aimed at improving blood flow from the brain by opening up blocked and twisted veins in the neck.

In the CTV segment, Zamboni explains that impaired drainage from the jugular veins or a large central vein that runs through the chest can cause a backup of blood and allow iron deposits to build up in the brain.

MS has long been considered an autoimmune disorder caused by immune cells attacking neurons in the spinal cord and brain. However, scientists have also observed unusually high levels of iron in the brains of people with MS, which many assumed was a byproduct of the condition, CTV reports.

Multiple sclerosis can cause a wide variety of symptoms, including balance problems, walking and speaking difficulties, fatigue and cognitive dysfunction. Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world. The MS Society of Canada estimates that between 55,000 and 75,000 Canadians have the disease.

Chronic Cerebro Spinal Venous Insufficiency, or CCSVI, is the name Zamboni has given the condition he believes may trigger multiple sclerosis, CTV reports. He says he has performed his surgery -- dubbed "la liberation" in Italian -- on 120 MS patients.

Results of a study of 65 of those patients, afflicted with the most common form of MS, will be published early next week in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Vascular Surgery*. A few researchers are now either considering investigative clinical trials based on Zamboni's work, or have already begun studies to confirm some of his findings.

CTV says Dr. Robert Zivadinov of the University of Buffalo is leading a study that hopes to enroll more than 1,000 MS patients from the United States and Canada to undergo ultrasound and MRI neck scans to detect blocked or twisted veins.

Still, not everyone is convinced.

Zamboni's hypothesis has been met with skepticism by many neurologists and researchers in the field. Both the MS societies of Canada and the United States have issued cautiously worded statements pointing out that there is insufficient evidence to suggest blocked veins are a root cause of the disease.

In fact, CTV reports that the MS societies are discouraging people with the disease from getting tested or seeking treatment until further studies are conducted.

For W5 broadcast times, check local listings. 19:02ET 20-11-09

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