healthzone.ca

Researcher says surgery has cured MS patients

November 21, 2009

Nicolaas van Rijn

Staff Reporter

An Italian researcher says he has successfully treated scores of patients with multiple sclerosis, which has long been thought to be an autoimmune disease.

But Dr. Paolo Zamboni, director of the centre for vascular diseases at the University of Ferrara, says his surgical treatment, which he has performed on 120 patients in Italy, including his wife, has radically altered their lives, leading some to say it's as if they've been reborn – without MS.

According to an investigation by CTV's *W5*, which airs at 7 p.m. in Toronto Saturday, Zamboni's approach provides a potentially promising but highly experimental treatment for the disease, which affects between 55,000 and 75,000 Canadians and some 2.5 million worldwide. It involves unblocking twisted veins in the chest and neck to improve blood flow.

MS, as it's known, was long considered an autoimmune disorder caused by immune cells attacking neurons in the spinal cord and brain. However, *W5* found, scientists have observed unusually high levels of iron in the brains of people with MS, which many assumed was a by-product of the condition.

Zamboni, who began researching MS after his wife was diagnosed with it in 1995, came up with the radical notion that the iron deposits play a role in causing MS.

In the *W5* 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. Chronic Cerebrospinal Venous Insufficiency, or CCSVI, is the name he has given the condition.

The report notes his hypothesis has been met with skepticism by many neurologists and researchers in the field. The MS societies of Canada and the United States say there is insufficient evidence to suggest blocked veins are a root cause of MS. Results of a study of 65 of Zamboni's patients will be published next week in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Vascular Surgery*.

W5 says Dr. Robert Zivadinov of the University of Buffalo is leading a study to use ultrasound and MRI neck scans to detect blocked or twisted veins.

With files from Canadian Press