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Implant benefits Parkinson's patients

Doctors on Tyneside say a new treatment for patients with Parkinson's disease is having remarkable results.

Newcastle General Hospital is one of only a few centres involved in trials of the new treatment called, deep brain stimulation.

The revolutionary technique involves a power pack implanted in the chest, which connects electrodes directly to the brain.

Doctors in Newcastle say patients have seen dramatic improvements to mobility and co-ordination.

Approximately 120,000 people in the UK have Parkinson's disease.

It affects approximately 1% of people aged 60 and over, though it can strike younger people and approximately 10,000 people are diagnosed with the disease each year.

It brings on tremors, motor problems and poor balance as well as difficulty in speaking.

The treatment involves an operation where surgeons drill through the skull and place tiny electrodes directly on the affected areas of the brain, which are determined beforehand by scans.

Wires are then trail down to a power pack and stimulator, which is implanted in the patient's chest.

The stimulator sends an electric current to the brain, which replaces the chemical elements missing in patients who suffer from Parkinson's disease.



Jocelyn Forster: Changed life



Doctor David Burn: Remarkable results

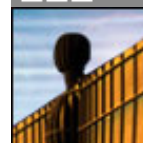
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The BBC's Anne Kostalas

"Patients have shown dramatic improvements after the treatment"



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Doctors in Newcastle say the results are almost instantaneous, with some patients being able to go home 48-hours after treatment.

Dr David Burn, a neurologist at Newcastle General, who is conducting the trial, said: "It's probably one of the most dramatic things that I have ever witnessed in terms of therapeutics.

"The person can literally be transformed from one minute being tremulous and slow to no tremor at all.

"They are able, almost at once to move easier and use their hands much quicker."

Jocelyn Forster from Ponteland, near Newcastle, has taken part in the trial.

She said: "It's just wonderful. I feel like a new person.

"It is just amazing that it does what it can do.

"It has given me a whole new life which is better altogether."

The trial in Newcastle follows a similar study in the United States.

In 2001, researchers from Oregon Health and Science University, also found the procedure reduced tremors and poor balance.



A stimulator is implanted in the chest of patients

As in Newcastle, doctors there used the treatment instead of prescribed drugs which, after years of use, further reduced mobility and balance.

American doctors examined 12 patients who had electrodes implanted between one and three years previously.

The patients were monitored on the hour for two days, during which time they continued to take their normal doses of medication.

The stimulators were turned off for one day and switched back on the following day.

The study found that patients were able to complete a walking test 13% faster when the stimulator was on.

They were also able to complete a finger-tapping test, which examines the slowness in movement associated with Parkinson's, 23% faster.

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