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MS as a vascular disease: Eureka moments throughout history

November 23, 2009 07:26 By **Dr. Lorne Brandes**

We all know the Greek word "eureka". Loosely translated, it means "I've found it."

Eureka has become synonymous with "epiphany" (in the non-religious sense of the word), variously defined as an intuitive grasp of reality through something (as an event) usually simple and striking; an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure; or a revealing scene or moment.

The first "eureka moment" in science is ascribed to **Archimedes**. In approximately 250 BC, the Greek mathematician noted that his bath water rose several inches and sloped over the edges as he stepped into the tub. While most other mortals would have simply picked up the bar of soap and got on with it, Archimedes had the sudden epiphany that the volume of bath water he displaced was equal to the volume of his body.

That simple observation, which changed the physics and mathematics of measurement forever, became known as "Archimedes' Principle". (Greek lore has it that, in his excitement, Archimedes ran through the streets naked, yelling, "Eureka!")

Let us now fast-forward to November 21, 2009, when a eureka moment shook the world of Multiple Sclerosis.

Appearing on CTV's W5, the network's medical specialist, Avis Favaro, told the compelling story of a **discovery** so amazing, so seemingly out of the blue, that viewers, including me, were left speechless.

Read more on the W5 webpage: [The Liberation Treatment](#)

In a nutshell, Dr. Paolo Zamboni, an Italian vascular surgeon at the University of Ferrara, has accumulated convincing ultrasound evidence that every MS patient he has examined, some 120 in all, have blockages in one or more neck or chest veins that drain blood from the brain back to the heart. Healthy subjects, or patients with neurological diseases other than MS, do not show these anomalies.

Not only does the venous blood not drain properly in patients with MS, it often backs up in the diseased vessels (called retrograde flow), causing congestion of the veins deep in the brain.

Dr. Zamboni postulated that, as a result of this reversed blood flow, the thin-walled veins leak blood into the surrounding brain tissue, resulting in active MS lesions, called plaques. In suggesting this, he drew from his knowledge of previously published autopsies on the brains of MS patients showing that plaques always form along venous pathways, and that a vein is always in the centre of an MS plaque! Recent MRI studies have [reconfirmed these observations](#).

How does leaking blood cause MS plaques? Blood is rich in iron; when iron gets into the brain tissue it is very toxic, causing inflammation around the insulating cells (myelin sheaths) that coat delicate nerve bundles. The result is a "short-circuiting" of electrical activity in the nerves and, in the worst case scenario, cell death.

Could iron toxicity from leaked blood be at the root of MS? Dr. Zamboni thinks it is.

He well may be right, according to Dr. Mark Haacke, affiliated with Hamilton's McMaster University and Detroit's Wayne State University. Using a special technique called **susceptibility weighted imaging (SWI)**, Haacke and his colleagues discovered that MS plaques contain significant amounts of iron.

But isn't MS primarily an autoimmune disease? Professor Zamboni believes that inflammation of the brain tissue, caused by the iron, is the primary event that secondarily turns on the immune system, adding to the damage. Opening the blocked veins to prevent further blood leakage and iron deposition, rather than giving immunosuppressive drugs, should be the best way to treat MS and prevent further attacks.

Now, in a "proof of concept" study, published in the Nov. 24th edition of the *Journal of Vascular Surgery*, Dr. Zamboni and his team report on the outcome of unblocking the veins in 65 patients. Thirty-five patients with the less severe, remitting-relapsing form of the disease, followed for at least 18 months, experienced a dramatic improvement in their symptoms and energy. Those whose veins remained open in the months after the procedure had no further MS attacks, and came off their steroids and other medications. At the same time, their MRI scans showed a dramatic drop in the number of MS plaques.

Perhaps with an eye on history, Dr. Zamboni's co-author, Dr. Fabrizio Salvi, has dubbed the unblocking operation the "liberation procedure": liberating the veins from blockage while (hopefully) liberating the patients from their disease. Yet, Dr. Zamboni is not claiming a cure. He is simply asking the medical world to put skepticism aside, reproduce his vein flow studies and assess his unblocking treatment as quickly as possible. The knowledge that hundreds of thousands of MS patients might benefit from his discovery weighs heavily on him.

Happily, researchers at the University of Buffalo have taken up the challenge, with Stanford University scientists about to do likewise. In Canada, McMaster's Dr. Haacke is inviting MS patients to send him their MRI scans for his review.

And what is the reaction of the National MS Societies in Canada and the United States? If their official [response](#) to Dr. Zamboni's research was any cooler, icicles would form on their

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 Ms Multiple Sclerosis Ms Multiple
 Sclerosis Multiple Myeloma Multiple
 Sclerosis Muscle Nannies Natural
 Health Products Directorate
 Nausea Newman Nitrates
 Nitroglycerine Nobel Nurses
 Obesity Ontario Organ Donation
 Organ Donor Orthopaedic
 Osteoporosis Outbreak Ovarian
 Cancer Overweight Pain
 Pandemic Parents Parp Inhibitor
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 Progestins Prostate Prostate
 Cancer Prosthetics Psa
 Psychiatric Disorder Psychiatry
 Psychology Ptsd Puttittary
 Quarantine Radiation Recession
 Rehab Research Restaurants
 Rethink Breast Cancer Ribavirin
 Sad Safety Saiba Salmonella
 Salt Sars School Schools
 Screening Seniors Sex Sexual
 Health Showers Skiing Skin Skin
 Cancer Sleep Smog Smoking
 Sodium Soft Drinks Solum Spice

spokespersons' lips. Why am I not surprised? These organizations are big money operations, run by risk-averse professionals and fundraisers who are absolutely petrified of making a mistake and prematurely backing a losing horse. Their interests are also heavily intertwined with those of Big Pharma, which has invested billions of dollars in developing immunosuppressive treatments for MS, such as [Betaseron](#) .

In a similar vein (excuse the pun), when Australian researchers Robin Warren and Barry Marshall published striking evidence in the 1980s that a previously unclassified bacterium, now called [Helicobacter pylori](#) , was the main cause of stomach and duodenal ulcers, they were greeted by a wall of silence.

At the time, the scientific community universally believed that stress and hyperacidity were the culprits. Not surprisingly, the importance of this contrarian discovery was further minimized by drug companies with a vested interest in chronic antacid therapies, not in a curative course of antibiotics.

Happily, the two researchers persisted in their work and converted the scientific community into believers. As a reward for shifting the paradigm, they received the [2005 Nobel Prize in Medicine](#) . It appears that some Eureka moments take a long time to be considered as such.

In discussing "[The Scientific Method](#)" , Dallas Baptist University professor, Dr. David Naugle, provides us with two memorable quotes: Sherlock Holmes once said to Watson: "You see, but you do not observe!" And Helen Keller similarly stated to a friend: "How tragic it is to have sight, but to lack vision!" Naugle goes on to point out that by overlooking the smallest clue or detail, we may miss the key to solving the problem.

Well put. Paolo Zamboni had the vision to observe what was always there, something simple and striking, yet unseen by everyone else. He came, he saw, he had an epiphany. Let us hope that when the final study results come in, we will all join Dr. Zamboni in shouting, "Eureka"!

For info on taking part in upcoming studies on CCSVI, read W5's [Question and Answer page](#) .

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Comments

11/23/2009 9:09:26 AM #
 As an MD, Dr. Brandes should be ashamed to attribute a cool reaction from the scientific and medical community to being in the pocket of 'big pharma' and being 'big money operations'. He should know as well as any other scientist that all new discoveries should rightfully be approached with a healthy skepticism and that falling head over heels for a new and unproven (as-of-yet) treatment is not a prudent course of action. If these organizations are reacting coolly, it's because they are taking a cautious approach until more evidence supporting the treatment is produced, not because of some conspiratorial link with 'big pharma'. Really, Dr. Brandes, we expect better.
 Mark (MD)

Mark

11/23/2009 9:40:50 AM #
 So let me get this straight, last week Dr. Brandeis writes a story saying there's no conspiracy by the Cancer Society to suppress a cure for cancer, but this week the MS society is in the pocket of big pharma?
 Tony

Tony

11/23/2009 1:15:53 PM #
 Truth is, no one really knows why the reaction was 'cool'. Not Dr. Brandes, and not you Dr. Mark. For either of you to make a firm, conclusive, statement to either end is unprofessional, and yes - we do expect more. But for anyone to presume money has nothing to do with decisions of this nature is a little naive, don't you think Dr. Mark? What if you were making huge sums of money from administering band-aids to neighbourhood children who were falling off their bikes every time they drove over that crack in th sidewalk. What if then someone came in and told you they were going to repair that crack, and wasn't this wonderful. Would not the realization that all that cash-flow was about to dry up cause a slight delay in your enthusiasm? Hopefully, your more compassionate side would shine through when you saw that the repair greatly reduced the number of children coming to your door. We'll see hey?
 Joe
 Joe
 Joe

Joe
 Joe
 Joe

11/23/2009 2:20:11 PM #
 This is a breakthrough for MS patients as I am an MS patient. The question is, is it going to be the large corporations and government that moves this procedure forward or is for the health and quality of life for the MS patients...I wonder which one will have the upper hand??? I have hope for this new breakthrough but knowing our government run health program it could take YEARS before we are tested or even have the procedure offered to us. In the meantime, they will let us with MS suffer more and take a chance on our well-being, every day with MS is a ticking bomb. All MS patients need to get on the bandwagon and demand studies are moved quicker in this breakthrough. At least we have the option in another country to have the procedure done, again it is if we have the \$80,000 US in our bank accounts.
 Maxine

Maxine

11/23/2009 3:05:30 PM #

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 Surgery Sweat Sweeteners
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 Vaccine Vegetables Veins Virus
 Vitamin D Vitamins Wait Times
 Walking Warfarin Water Watson
 Weight Weight Loss West Nile
 Whooping Cough Wii Fit Willow
 Winter Women Work Work-Life
 Balance Workplace Injury Yasmin
 Zamboni

I have plans to stop fundraising for the ms society and do fundraising for my wife for the treatment! the ms society should have gotten on board and be a part not take a wait and see approach they have the money

bdcairn 

11/23/2009 3:11:50 PM #

I wonder if any research has been done to find a connection between circulation and alzheimers and parkinsons.

Larry 

11/23/2009 3:21:28 PM #

I've been following MS research and development of understanding of MS (.from a distant layman's perspective) as my father was first diagnosed with MS 30 years ago. This diagnosis helped to explain that there was a medical condition behind his developed physical and emotional impairment over the 15 or 20 previous years, but never provided him or our family with any relief from these symptoms.

This eureka moment documented by Zamboni is truly something worth continued observation and research, as it MAY be a piece of this human enigma we call MS. My sister has serious physical impairment from this condition, and I have had an episode that the neurologist was not willing to call MS, but I had identified lesion development on my Central Nervous System.

Sign me up... I am a willing participant for this type of study and for the cardiovascular surgery that may accompany it.

Rod 

11/23/2009 4:04:40 PM #

Article à lire

Jacinthe Boissé 

11/23/2009 7:48:49 PM #

How can my daughter, with Primary Progressive MS get into a study?

Kirtsy Mitchell 

11/23/2009 7:54:10 PM #

A few of us on the Facebook group "MS Village Canada" have been discussing this discovery and our extreme interest in getting in on any studies as well as petitioning our government and Health to consider making more and larger studies a possibility. From what I've heard Hamilton's study will be quite small whereas Buffalo's will involve 1000 participants. Regardless of comments made by physicians or the MS Society, this is our health and we need to insist that any valid medical claims be taken seriously and investigated - without a crap-load and years of red tape. Let's not waste alot of energy and page space with arguing intents and purposes. 2 members of my family are very keen to find a cure to MS or failing that, something to halt it in its tracks.

Nadine 

11/23/2009 9:43:14 PM #

we need to put pressure on the MS society to get on board and investigate this more fully

Kerry 

11/23/2009 9:49:51 PM #

Since I was told about this breakthrough, last evening, I have been bouncing off the walls.

My beautiful, vibrant sister was diagnosed at the age of 25 with MS. It's been 15 long years, hundreds of thousands of dollars in medication, and far too many "attacks". I understand a healthy amount of reservation, but honestly, these findings are so logical and the cure so "simple" that the discovery is most likely.....absolutely correct. Iron poisoning!! Remove the iron build up...remove the problem!!

I am not surprised at the lack of enthusiasm shown by the MS Society. It is sad, but it is a reality that illness provides an income stream, jobs, and the means for many people to provide for their families. If we remove the illness, then we do cause issues in other areas. I have no doubt, that ANY cure will be phased in, over time. But, all of this aside, TODAY is a day to rejoice!! There IS a light at the end of the tunnel!!

Kim 

11/23/2009 9:51:51 PM #

Joe, a large proportion of the membership and societies such as MS Society of Canada often are composed of those suffering from MS, family members of MS sufferers, MS Researchers and physicians specializing in MS. These are not individuals who have a vested interest in prolonging an effective treatment or cure; rather, they are individuals who deeply desire to see themselves, their family members or their patients healthy, functional, and well. It is far from unprofessional to criticize someone who would impugn the motives of such individuals and organizations, especially so considering that their goal consists of finding effective treatments and an eventual cure for MS. With that in mind, what is more naive: to believe that those dedicated towards a cure for themselves and their loved ones are somehow perversely in the pocket of 'big pharma', or that they are displaying an appropriate and reserved response until more evidence comes in?

Vascular surgery isn't without it's risks, which can include stroke and significant bleeding. It is neither prudent nor ethical to subject someone to such risk when there isn't a body of evidence suggesting the surgery works or produces a benefit that outweighs the risk of surgery. An organization dedicated to supporting and helping MS sufferers would likewise be less than responsible in promoting an unproven (as of yet) treatment to those with the disease at such an early stage in the research.

People should not mistake prudence with callousness.

Mark 

11/23/2009 9:56:19 PM #

Apologies for the typos in my previous posting; as an addendum I would like to state that I sincerely hope that this research is confirmed and bears fruit, leading to effective treatment for MS sufferers.

Mark, MD

Mark 

11/24/2009 12:15:03 PM #

http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20091123/ms_folo_091123/20091123?s_name=W5

"MS Society calls for research into experimental therapy"

Looks like they aren't so reticent after all.

William 

11/24/2009 12:55:19 PM #

I hope so too, Dr. Mark.

Joe 

11/25/2009 2:38:45 AM #

Anche Aism Italia ha aperto ieri a CCSVI dicendosi disponibile a finanziare uno studio multicentrico, uniamo gli sforzi di tutto il mondo, facciamo progredire la scienza!!! Conosco il prof. Zamboni, è persona meritevole di ogni stima, è un grande.

Dante Edmondi 

11/25/2009 2:42:16 AM #

www.fondazionehilarescere.org

Dante Edmondi 

11/26/2009 3:12:54 PM #

My husband has been suffering with pms for years. We are extremely glad to hear of this breakthrough and wish that the doctors and scientists hurry to offer this to patients who need help quickly. We also hope that red tape mentality that Canadian health politics do not come into play in this important discovery that can change MS forever. We want to sign up to anything on the liberation therapy. Who do we contact?

Rose Anne 

11/27/2009 1:03:12 PM #

Thank you Dr Brandes for such a well written article that captures the importance and the magic of the revolutionary findings of Dr Zamboni. To me the sadest statement concerning the MS Society is the fact that they completely missed this major development in MS. Dr Zamboni has been publishing on this concept since 2006 and has some 7 major papers out there. His most important ones were publically available in late 2008 and early 2009. The MS Society has a scientific advisory committee which has a number of "big name" neurologists on it. The question is why were all these researchers asleep at the switch for at least a year. Don't they read the scientific literature? Their failure to even be aware of the Zamboni work and thus not begin a research program much earlier may have major negative consequences for the MS patient community in Canada. The MS Society has greatly failed its members by not having in place an advisory committee that stays abreast of major new developments in MS. We can only hope they will rectify this horrific problem by reconstituting a new scientific advisory committee with members who actually read the literature and know an important contribution when they see one. If they don't, how can we be sure that right now and every day in the future that MSSOC is not aware of another major breakthrough in MS. The MS community of Canada depends on MSSOC to provide important new information that may have implications for health. When MSSOC fails to do this, they must regroup and make some drastic changes so they can be counted on as a reliable source of important information.

Ashton Embry 

11/28/2009 3:30:02 AM #

Here, here Ashton Embry!

Asleep at the switch in deed.

solipsist 

11/29/2009 9:41:29 PM #

I have had MS for 17 years now. A number of years back, I was a volunteer Board member for the Alberta Division. Never have I had the priveledge of meeting such dedicated people - Board members and employees. There goal is to end MS...for real, period! Anyone who might imply any degree of self interest hasn't really been exposed to this cause or the people behind the fundraising and Client Services provided. Shame on you. I have nothing but respect and admiration for these dedicated people who help so many. I believe the MS Society will help usher in a new era of the Liberation therapy. We're lucky to have them...God bless Dr. Zamboni and his colleagues. Do I sense a Nobel Prize coming on?

David 

11/30/2009 5:12:02 PM #

Asleep at the wheel, indeed. How can it be that a charity that collects millions of dollars a year did not know about this treatment a few years ago? How can it be that it will take another year or 2 for them to do their own research to see if they can parallel Dr. Zamboni's findings? What a huge loss of valuable time for thousands of Canadians that suffer from this horrible killer.

I loved how humble Dr. Zamboni was. He's not pumping some penny stock company. He's not hyping anything. He just calmly and quietly told his story. And what a story it was.

I spent most of the morning this past Saturday reading every article that I could on this discovery. I watched some of the W5 video with tears running down my face. I read everything that I could. I pray that the MS Society can get their act together and that the Canadian Medical Assoc. can research and approve this treatment in time for my Mother to be spared from the wheel chair. I pray that tens of thousands of Canadians don't have to go through what my family has gone through.

The first response that I thought I saw was the MS Society play down the "discovery" and warn everyone to not get excited. Only a few days later, I see they are going out for proposals. A big CYA 180? I hope this was because they are excited about the Science and not to save their jobs. I guess I shouldn't care what the motives are as long as they thoroughly research Dr. Zamboni's Liberation Treatment.

Sadly, I also see the detractors are out in full force. I see some Neurologists blindly dismissing the notion that Dr. Zamboni could be on to something huge. Of course, they have to say that. How else can they explain the years of prescribing awful toxic drugs to their MS patients? How can they excuse the years of treatment that they have put their patients through only to now tell them they were wrong all these years?

If you or a loved one have MS, call your MS Society, call your Neurologist to get information. Some of them run clinics in their hospital or University. Some of them may be able to run tests and MRI's.

The Dr. in Hamilton that is working with Dr. Zamboni says it only takes an extra 20 minutes on your next MRI to look for these venous problems in your neck area. Get your Dr. to do this. Pressure them. Don't let them off the hook.

If you have spare money, get the MRI done at your own expense and forward it to him as requested. The sooner this method of treatment is proved as being effective the sooner lives can be changed.

Quinn C 

12/3/2009 8:38:25 PM #

I have a son who was diagnosed with Relapse-Remitting MS in 1994 when he was 20 years old. For 9 years after diagnosis he was in remission and doing well. Since then he has had 3 or 4 episodes some worst than others. Steroids have helped him and he is presently on copaxone. He has been much luckier than most because he hasn't been left with too many after effects. He has a little bit of weakness in his right leg and his speech is affected a little. This latest news on CCSVI is very exciting for our family. My son is only 35 years old and still doing well but that could change tomorrow. Having this test done is essential. We are talking of a possible cause here which can hopefully lead to a cure. What have we got to lose by at least setting up tests for MS patients to see if they have the narrowing in their veins? People are having test done to check for blocked arteries so why not have MS patients checked for narrowed veins. This should be done as soon as possible. If MS patients can then have the treatment, it may not cure what has already happened but at least it may stop the disease from progressing. Time is of the essence for people like my son.

Hazel 

12/3/2009 9:21:59 PM #

I hope that it will not take as long to explore this theory for autism as well. Autism has so many similarities to MS and there are SOOO many families who have to give their children over to be placed in group homes and taken away from them because of the behaviors (which are a LOT like dementia). Please doctors and researchers, don't take so long exploring this connection and get these kids treated!

Karen Freeman 

12/6/2009 2:10:24 PM #

Thank You .

Malgorzata 

3/7/2010 3:10:02 PM #

I would like to thank Dr. Mark, 11/23/2009 9:51:51 PM #, for his comments supporting the MS society. I was recently at an appointment to see my neurologist who happens to be an MS researcher. What he showed me in regards to Dr. Zamboni's study broke my heart. He posted a medical paper upon his return to Italy on his MS research only to loose his medical license. The paper was HIS words. It stated that his research was not done in a scientific manner and that his subjects either remained on or began drug treatment ie. copaxone, betaserone, rebif, etc. I was actually partway to going into a study in Buffalo, well no more. When he has done proper research, and I would volunteer for that, then ok but not while it is just junk science. I apologize to all those I talked into believing in this.

Kathy 

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