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100 local MS patients will get special treatment

March 26, 2010

BY JOANNA FRKETICH
HAMILTON SPECTATOR

St. Joseph's is holding the equivalent of a big-jackpot lottery for area multiple sclerosis patients when it randomly selects 100 of them to take part in its study of a radical new theory that the disease is vascular.

More than 22,000 MS patients from all over the world have vied for one of the spots in the Hamilton research testing the theory of Italian Dr. Paolo Zamboni that is expected to start this summer.

But in the end, only area patients will take part.

Researchers Dr. Ian Rodger and Dr. Mark Haacke will randomly choose from 1,200 patients who have been treated by Hamilton's MS Clinic located at McMaster University Medical Centre.

They will do ultrasounds and MRI scans to determine if there is any difference in the veins draining blood from the head in MS patients compared to 100 similar healthy people.

Zamboni believes the veins draining blood from the brain are blocked and leaking in MS patients. This allows iron to leak into brain tissue and he thinks the buildup causes many symptoms of MS. Zamboni found those veins blocked or malformed in more than 90 per cent of MS patients he studied -- including his wife.

It's a radical departure from current thinking that MS is an autoimmune disease with few treatments.

St. Joseph's is one of only two centres in Canada studying the theory. The other is in British Columbia.

Rodger and his staff are hoping to personally contact each of the more than 22,000 patients who have asked to be part of the study.

"We feel an obligation to get back to these people," said Rodger. "A lot of patients would love to be part of the study, but from the standpoint of scientific rigor you have to do the selection randomly otherwise bias can come into the data you may generate."

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