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MS vein theory has roots in rejected research



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CTV.ca News Staff
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Interest in a controversial new theory that blocked veins in the neck and chest could be triggering multiple sclerosis has received huge interest since CTV's W5 first broke the story last November.

Italy's Dr. Paolo Zamboni brought the concept to the forefront of the medical world, yet it has roots in decades of research. In fact, researchers have been investigating the link between MS and blood flow in the neck for close to a century.

Austria's Dr. Franz Schelling was among those who studied the link. For 30 years, the now-retired doctor has been on a frustrating mission to get someone to study his findings. He theorized that poor blood flow from their brains of MS patients might be caused by damaged veins, which then triggers or contributes to the symptoms that mark MS.

Dr. Schelling worked as a family doctor trained in radiology and neurology and spent much of his career treating patients with MS. He became convinced it was not just a disease of the immune system.

He collected research that pointed to damage in the brains in those with MS. He also analyzed X-rays of MS patients and found odd anomalies in the neck and skulls of patients compared to healthy people.

But Schelling's requests for more study were repeatedly rejected by MS specialists who insisted what has long been promoted: the disease is caused by immune problems, not the veins.

"It really cracked me down, because I had patients that... patients died of MS," he told CTV News from his home in Dornbirn, Austria.

Schelling says he went to Vienna, New York, London and points in between, asking doctors and researchers to investigate the vein-MS link. But no one was interested.

Now, the long-proposed theory is being explored at high speed. Scientists from Europe, Canada and elsewhere are in Italy to learn about Dr. Zamboni's breakthrough research, as well as learn from his team how to test for the vein problems that Zamboni has dubbed CCSVI, or chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency.

Those scientists include radiologist Lindsay Machan from the University of British Columbia.

"We don't want this to languish for a long period. We want to get to the bottom of this," Machan says.

Photos



Dr. Franz Schelling, a retired doctor, is among those who have studied the link.

More on this topic

- This week on W5: The Liberation War
- More on Dr. Franz Schelling

CTV News Video

CTV National News: Avis Favaro on the treatment
Demand for a controversial treatment for multiple sclerosis is building in Canada. With prospective patients waiting for the treatment to go through testing, revelations have emerged that a similar therapy could have been tested years ago.

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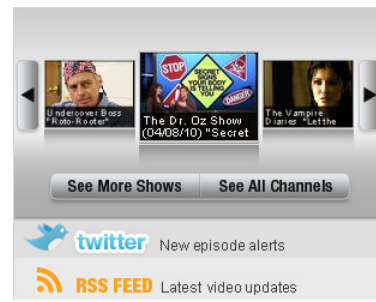
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Zamboni tells CTV News that in the last six months, there has been "an explosion of interest and we are going really fast." At least half a dozen studies on CCSVI are planned or underway around the world.

Doctors say many of these studies are coming following a push from MS patients, who don't want doctors to wait any longer testing the CCSVI theory. They also want doctors to begin providing Zamboni's Liberation Treatment, a venoplasty procedure in which a balloon is inserted into the neck veins to open them.

But MS specialists say it's important to do the studies to test the CCSVI theory methodically before proceeding with possible treatments.

"It may be a few years, but very quickly we'll get to research that helps us make sure that treatments are offered with the appropriate safeguards," says Yves Savoie, the president and chief executive of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada.

But scientists in Italy hope to have further data from studies to conform or refute the theories available in less than a year, as patients around the world wait eagerly for an answer.

From a report by CTV medical specialist Avis Favaro and producer Elizabeth St. Philip

This Saturday on W5, CTV medical specialist Avis Favaro will provide part two of her feature report on CCSVI, investigating the debate that has developed between MS patients and their doctors. The episode, entitled "The Liberation War," will air on March 10, at 7 p.m. ET. Check local listings for times in your area.

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I've noticed that EVERY TIME a Conservative MP gets caught doing something the response is always the same from the Conservative supporters: "yeah but what about the time that the Liberals..." Stop it. Get a backbone, stop kowtowing to the Conservative party, get your own opinion rather than regurgitating what they tell you to say, and you'll find yourself far less miserable than you are right now. Try to insist that the people you so blindly follow RISE ABOVE the rest rather than constantly lowering the bar and insisting that bad behaviour is okay because someone else did it too. That's the logic that children use. Is it any wonder we can't get one good leader of any party in this country?

Jay, Ottawa

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