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CTV TORONTO

Ontario won't yet fund studies on new MS treatment

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Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, left, and Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall speak to media following meeting of the Council of the Federation in Regina, Sask., Friday, Aug. 7, 2009. (Geoff Howe / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

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CTV.ca News Staff

Saskatchewan is ready to fund clinical trials of a new procedure that could offer hope to people with multiple sclerosis, but Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty says his province won't yet follow suit.

McGuinty admits he's heard reports that the "liberation treatment" to open blocked neck and chest veins seems to offer real hope to people with MS. But he says he'd like to see more than anecdotal evidence supporting the procedure, noting "it's early days yet."

Regarding funding for MS patients who would like to try the treatment, Ontario Health Minister Deb Matthews says the province has made it clear it intends to rely on scientific evidence to determine what procedures it will fund, and "there's still no evidence to support this."

However, both McGuinty and Matthews said governments owe it to people with MS to look closely at the liberation treatment and its effect on those with the disease.

On Tuesday, Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall said he wanted his province to be the first to help pay for clinical trials into the controversial treatment. He said he wanted his province to be a leader in "exploring every possible source of hope for those who are battling MS."

"We're simply saying, if the research community comes forward with plans for clinical trials so that we can actually test the liberation treatment here in the province, even though we would be the first in Canada, we would be happy to fund that," Wall told CTV News.

And he said he hoped other provinces would join his province in funding studies.

"I may well be raising this issue when the premiers meet later this summer, and inviting other provinces to join with the province of Saskatchewan," Wall said.

In an interview with CTV News Channel later on Wednesday afternoon, Wall acknowledged that Saskatchewan has the highest rate of MS in Canada.

"So I think it's our responsibility with the public health-care system to lead in potential research" on the disease, he said. "There's a lot of hope here, and we want to explore that hope to the best extent possible."

The liberation treatment is based on an unproven theory that many, if not most, MS patients have a vein condition dubbed CCSVI (chronic

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A scan displayed by Italian Dr. Paolo Zamboni shows a partially blocked vein in an MS patient.

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Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall discusses funding research for MS on Tuesday, July 27, 2010.

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- CTV National News: Daniele Hamamdjian reports
CTV Winnipeg: Jon Hendricks on the trials
CTV News Channel: Brad Wall, Sask. premier
CTV News Channel: Kirsty Duncan, Liberal MP
CTV Regina: Dale Hunter reports

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cerebrospinal venous insufficiency), which is marked by blocked veins in the neck or chest. The theory, proposed by Italian doctor Paolo Zamboni, is that CCSVI causes blood to reflux back into the brain, leading to the symptoms that mark MS.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada has been cautious about the new theory, saying a lot more research is needed.

"It's a new concept and it's got to be looked into," Paula Moon-Wozney of the MS Society's Saskatchewan division told CTV on Tuesday. She added: "The more research that goes on into this very exciting area of research, the better."

The Canadian Institute for Health Research also put out the call earlier this year to scientists urging them to submit grant proposals to study the effectiveness of the liberation treatment, which is a form of angioplasty to open blocked neck veins.

With no doctors widely offering the procedure in Canada, a number of Canadian MS patients have been travelling to places like Bulgaria, Poland and Costa Rica to find clinics willing to give them the treatment – often at the cost of tens of thousands of dollars.

While many of these patients are filling the Internet with blog entries and YouTube video testimonies of how the treatment has arrested or sometimes even reversed their symptoms, other patients have had less success. And many physicians worry that the procedure may not be without risk.

Earlier this year, editors of the Canadian Medical Association Journal joined the debate, encouraging MS patients to demand more research into the theory, noting that "To date, the published evidence is limited to a case series of 65 patients."

They added that any new research funding into CCSVI should be allocated based on evidence, not political or patient pressure.

"Good health policy decisions should not be based on hope and desperation," they wrote. "Equally, scientists and skeptics should avoid discounting novel ideas prematurely. It is precisely the unexpected scientific discovery that often leads to major advances in care."

With a report from CTV Regina's Dale Hunter

Comments are now closed for this story

adm Saskatchewan

This is just another reason why Saskatchewan is the best province to live in. Way to go Brad Wall!

Ray

Why is the Province of Saskatchewan funding these trials? Where is all the money that we have donated to MS over the years?

John Issigonis

"The Liberation treatment" has been given in Canada, the latest to a Mr Bill Harrison around the middle of April 2010. Why it is not still being done is a mystery to me. (See CBC news article "Experimental MS surgery done under radar". If a patient has blocked veins they should be fixed under the medical system - to me, that's a no brainer. Thanks to Saskatchewan hopefully the other provinces will smarten up and get with the program.

joe longo

Mr. Premier: Thank-you for your far reaching foresightedness into CCSVI research and treatment. I am Joe Longo from Guelph, ON and I am on Albany's waiting list for the treatment. What a joy it would be to get it done right here in Canada. I find it reprehensible in the extreme that MS is the only condition that does not qualify for an angio. A procedure that has been done for 40 years. The docs know how to adapt to angio's of the neck so let them. My 3 veins indicated in Dr. Zamboni's protocol have been scanned. All they need is the angio. We want it now and join you in your efforts to bring this to Canada and all it's awesome provinces and territories. Thank-you Mr. Premier! Viva La liberatione! Joe Longo

Doug # BC

Grandstanding. I like Brad Wall, but I think this is more political than anything. This research is on going, unproven, costly, and its effectiveness has yet to be determined. While I truly hope that it results in a success rate that can justify providing the treatment to everyone, I don't see how our health care system can afford huge numbers of "trials" until, or unless this is a proven CURE. I am not an evil ogre. But it seems to me that the same amount of money will save more lives if it's spent on PROVEN procedures. Limited trial may be in order here. But given how some will interpret this procedure as a Charter Right, even though it may not succeed, health care people should proceed, but with caution. This may lead to a cure for all. But it could also cost a lot of health care dollars, and eventually lead us down a dead end road. There is little room in our health care budgets for treatments that are experimental until they become proven effective. As of now, there is no proven cure for this terrible condition. Trials, of course, it's the right thing to do. But massive entitlements for thousands of patients, based on unproven treatments for ANY condition can bankrupt the health care system. "Be not the first by whom the new is tried, nor the last to cast the old aside". Caution should be exercised here. That will benefit ALL patients of the health care system. Unwise expenditures hurt us all. I hope they move forward. But move prudently.

Ala'a

Way to Go!! You have our Support!!! its about time!!!

Teela

Ray the money that has been donated for MS has been used for things like medications, equipment (wheel chairs, lifts) and to support the financial burden on families affected by MS. There is just not enough money to go around for everything.

Marggie May

I'd be able to travel to Sask.- too advanced to make it to India or Poland! I'd be happy to delay or stop what lies ahead...if not I'd be good practice! I have never been in the right place at the right time in my illness to have had injections to slow it down. If nothing else I'd like to have some hope!

Dianne Mack

It's great to see a province step into the future. Some individuals with MS do not have the time to wait for Research protocol. This procedure seems to be well worth the risk for so many and should be available to a consenting MS sufferer. It's terrible to see so many hard earned Canadian Dollars being spent elsewhere.

A. Concerned Citizen

You ask where is the research money that MS Society raises, have you looked at the financial statements? I am a firm believer in this procedure; I have had three close friends that have had this procedure done and it has changed their lives. It is not new, other countries have been doing this for many years. The fact of the matter is that our pharmaceutical companies in North America control not only the research dollars, they also control the curriculum in universities across North America.... conflict of interest? We all need to wake up to the greed that consumes our economy and realize that healthcare should not be "for profit"!

Richard

Ray... most of the money you have donated to the MS 'search for a cure' has gone to the pooh-bahs in the air-conditioned corner offices ... gone to support their fat salaries. Needless to say, the last thing they want to see is a 'cure' and the redundancy of their jobs.

Albertaboy111

Thank god at least one politician in this country isn't completely in the pocket of big pharma, who by the way stand to loose billions of dollars in profit every year from the EXPERIMENTAL HIGHLY DANGEROUS drugs they sell to MS sufferers, if this works. Why the government pays \$30,000 a year for my friend to take a drug that makes her sicker than the MS. All I can say is about time and thank you Mr. Wall.

sk resident

Ray & Richard - not only are your comments untrue and misinformed, they are also quite rude. Seriously, financial statements for a not for profit organization is public information so go take a look. If you think that the people who work at the MS Society don't have the goal of ending MS it's just hard to take anything you say seriously. The people who work there don't work for free as I'm sure you don't, but they aren't overly compensated. Talented individuals work on behalf of those living with MS to provide services that will enhance their quality of life and to provide funding to research that WILL ultimately find a cure to MS. It has been very disheartening to see the MS Society slammed in the public with statements like the ones the two of you have written. Please have some respect for those that work everyday to meet the mission of the MS Society.

Natalie

I agree with Joe Longo, I too am on a waiting list in Poland to have the Liberation Treatment ,,, I along with all other MS sufferers Thank you for helping bring this "giving us back our life" treatment to Canada.

Natalie Baluk- Edmonton, AB.

uplatejoe

The reason Sask government is doing this is because Sask has the highest number of MS cases per capita than anywhere else in north America. Some say its do to pesticides some say it due to nuclear fall-out from the 60's. Either way if your running a province that has so many cases then it would make sense to help fund a cure. And by the way all the money raised for research is spent on finding cures that can be patented and not spent on true research.

Jason B in Calgary

Consider how much each case of MS costs taxpayers directly through the healthcare system, and indirectly through loss of income and tax revenue. Then consider how much it costs the individual MS patient and their family financially, and consequent reduction in quality of life. When these costs are put together, and further consider that Saskatchewan has the highest rate of MS in Canada, the reward to risk ratio of this experiment is actually quite favorable to the Saskatchewan government. Get the clinical trials going!

Steve dalman

There are many MS patients going for the liberation treatment on their

own. All these patients are an immense untapped resource for data. Someone ought to collect this information on these patients both before and after their treatment and compare it to that of a matched set of untreated patients. Would this be too difficult or just too simple?

Albertaboy111

Dalton, even if I lived in Ontario I would never vote for you based on this alone. Hack!!

Chad

Doug # BC

"Grandstanding. I like Brad Wall, but I think this is more political than anything. This research is on going, unproven, costly, and its effectiveness has yet to be determined."

Since when is researching a possible lifesaving surgery grandstanding? Trying being someone with MS. It won't be costly compared to the reduced treatments if it works. Besides this type surgery is performed for many other reason. The risk is low, so what could it hurt. Ontario is not funding it because they waste all their money on useless windmills.

cc- Ont.

I am once again disappointed and angry over the response by Ontario Premier McGuinty and Deb Mathews, Health Minister regarding their refusal to provide support studies on the Liberation Treatment for people with MS. I fully expect the Premier of my province to provide legitimate information regarding Health Canada's Ethics committee refusal to approve funding for studies to take place to test the Liberation Treatment. Premier McGuinty says that the Ontario Government intends to rely on scientific evidence. How is this evidence to be attained if the ethics committee has not yet approved that studies can take place. I admire the Premier of Sask for taking an active role in this new treatment and I am truly disillusioned by Ontario Premier for stating he wants scientific evidence when he knows full well that this evidence is being put on hold by Health Canada. I know that the drug companies reap huge huge profits, and the government seems not to dispute this. I believe that people with MS should have the option to try the Liberation Treatment. It makes sense to me and to many people with MS to have this procedure rather than spend their lives taking drugs and in many cases seeing their symptoms worsen with each year.

Sue

Good, they are many other researchers working on the same thing, no need for Ontario & every other province to waste money on the same research.

Hmmmm..

If this treatment is successful, it might affect the bottom-line for some drug companies. I wonder how much pressure they are placing on the MS Society of Canada and on Dalton McGuinty to not support this research? Hmmmm. Will not fund research until more research is completed. Kind-of a catch-22 situation.

MortimerSnerd

The search for a treatment boils down to a competition between many competing agendas and a few comfortable pews. Vein angioplasty, while different from arterial angioplasty is not a new treatment. Any patient who has blocked veins in the neck, or CCSVI as it's now known, HAS a recognized and serious but treatable medical condition. The fact that MS MAY be a byproduct of that condition should not be a bar to a cardiovascular surgeon from diagnosing and treating a patients CCSVI. Barring people, just because they have MS from seeking and confirming the diagnosis of CCSVI is the ultimate in medical hypocrisy.

Laurie

My sister-in-law just arrived home from Bulgaria after having this procedure and she has already seen dramatic benefits. Worldwide results from this procedure are incredibly positive. Congratulations to Brad Wall for taking the lead on this. One can only wonder why the CMA is dragging their feet on this most important matter.

Retired in Burlington

If a person is beyond 21 years of age and is challenged with ms why can't they decide for themselves if they want or require the treatment? The doctors give drugs whether they want or require them. Research has been accomplished by Dr. Zamboni which I do not think is haphazard nor without merit. This may not be the ultimate treatment for everyone but surely to goodness people of an appropriate age or even their guardians can decide for themselves. This is totally not acceptable for the government people who are not impacted by ms personally to decide for the numerous families challenged in Ontario. Shame on the government and particularly Premier (until the next election). Please remember this everyone at the next election because it is not far away. I have a long memory myself and so will msers.

Proudly from Saskatchewan

While I'm not a rapid conservative support of Mr Wall, I'm most likely gonna vote for him in the next election because of his leadership on this issue. Conducting the trials here certainly makes the most sense given our extraordinary rate of MS development, but politicians aren't

famous for leadership these days - even on the obvious issues. As for those that thing charities are focused on cures...take a good grip on your hair and pull. Once you hear the "pop", you'll start receiving enough oxygen to know why charities MUST be focused on treatments, not cures.

Paul

It is the typical government answer, "no money for funding" until governments start to fund this procedure there will be no Canadian studies going on to prove that this is a treatment. The Neuological community does not want to touch this as "there are no proven studies to support this theory", wake up, until somebody funds this study Canadians with MS are going to suffer because of this stand everyone is taking.

Rouben

Why we have to suffer in every single day of our life? If there is an answer in our sufferings. Canada is one of the powerful country in the world, why we're so behind???? Shame on us.....What is Bulgaria, India and Poland compare to us....

stevo

Dalton would be singing a different tune if a family member had MS.

Sandra

Mr. Wall has done the right thing and hopefully other provinces will follow his lead. Angioplasty is a safe, simple procedure and is offered to anyone without MS. This is not a new treatment no-one should be walking around with blocked veins to do so is unsafe and costly to society!! Bravo Saskatchewan:-)

firstMickey

When somebody has suffered for several years with MS, something always looks better than nothing.

Marilyn

Why can't we get it done in Ontario - because the Premier is too busy with the Eco Fee (tax) whatever you want to call it. It's more important than people!

[Consiglia](#) 25 persone hanno consigliato questo elemento. Fallo anche tu, prima di tutti i tuoi amici.



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