

News Release

26 October 2010

Ankle team lead the way

Clinicians at Dorset County Hospital are using pioneering techniques to improve the care of patients undergoing major ankle surgery.

Patients are now able to go home within 24 hours of their operation pain free and can avoid the unpleasant side effects of a general anaesthetic and strong painkillers thanks to a new method of regional anaesthesia.

Regional anaesthesia is a technique that blocks nerve fibres. This gives the patient excellent postoperative pain relief and it is so effective the patient does not feel the foot being operated on.

The improved service has been possible thanks to a team effort by everyone involved - Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon Mr Nick Savva, Consultant Anaesthetist Dr Oliver Tweedie, Physiotherapists Matt Flux and Mairi Rabbets and Occupational Therapist Hilary Caines.

Consultant Anaesthetist Dr Oliver Tweedie said: "We are effectively taking the pain out of foot and ankle surgery. Major foot and ankle surgery is known to cause severe pain for more than 48 hours. We are sending patients home with a continuous nerve block, which means they are almost pain free for over three days.

"This technique means we can avoid giving patients a general anaesthetic and strong painkillers. Recovery time is much quicker and patients don't suffer from a general anaesthetic hangover, nor do they get sick, dizzy or sleepy from the strong painkillers. Patients undergoing major ankle surgery used to have to stay in hospital for up to seven days, but now they can go home the same day, or within 24 hours.

"Very few hospitals in the country are providing this service. It's a very new technique and we are leading the way with this procedure."

In November, Dr Tweedie will be giving a presentation on how DCH is delivering this service to the 6th National Symposium on Ultrasound in Regional Anaesthesia & Pain to be held at the Royal College of Physicians.

A patient satisfaction survey has shown that all patients were happy with their pain relief during the procedure and at home with the continuous nerve block. They all said they would have the operation done the same way again.

One happy customer is 71-year-old Bill Painter from West Stafford.

Mr Painter underwent ankle surgery with regional anaesthesia after having several operations with a traditional general anaesthetic, so he is well placed to compare the two.

He said: "It really is incredible. It's like your body is in two halves during the operation – your top half functions normally, but from the waist down you can feel nothing, no pain at all.

"Being awake during surgery isn't for everyone – you have a sheet in front of your head so you can't see anything but you can hear everything going on. But everyone is very reassuring and excellent at what they do. For me it was so much better than having an operation under a general anaesthetic – I would definitely have it done this way again. You don't feel sick or dozy afterwards and you can be back at home far quicker.

"My ankle is much better now and I'm hoping this operation will be my last."

ENDS

Photo shows patient Bill Painter, left, with anaesthetist Dr Oliver Tweedie, centre, and surgeon Mr Nick Savva.

For more information or to arrange interview opportunities please contact Communications Manager Susie Palmer on 01305 254683, susie.palmer@dchft.nhs.uk (Mon to Wed) or the Chief Executive's Office on 01305 254645 (Thurs and Fri).