

Drug Pump Benefits Teen With Severe Spasticity From Cerebral Palsy

(NAPSA)—There's encouraging news for thousands of Americans who suffer from severe spasticity, a condition marked by tight, stiff muscles that make movement—especially of the arms and legs—difficult or uncontrollable.

Spasticity is often a symptom of cerebral palsy, brain injury, stroke, spinal cord injury and multiple sclerosis. The condition may be painful and may interfere with a person's function or comfort. Everyday activities like walking, eating, dressing and bathing often become time-consuming and difficult for both the individual and the caregiver. Spasticity can also lead to additional medical problems such as joint stiffness, pressure sores and pneumonia.

Consider the case of 18-year-old Jennifer Walter, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy when she was less than a year old. (Cerebral palsy is a chronic condition that can affect body movement and muscle control and coordination.)

When Jennifer was nine, she began to experience tightness in her muscles and as a result had two tendons lengthened. At age 13, her condition worsened. She began experiencing spastic, jerky movements that caused her to bruise her hips on her wheelchair and kick the footplates off at least once a week. She was diagnosed with severe spasticity.

In time, Jennifer also became frustrated with her attempts to communicate. When someone had difficulty understanding her, she would withdraw from conversation. She enjoyed art, but was discouraged by her reliance on others. "It was a struggle to find ways to express ideas and creativity without the intervention of other people," said Sue Walter, Jennifer's mother. By the time Jennifer was 16, she was hesitant to eat in social settings and her self-confidence was low.

Doctors tried oral baclofen, an antispasmodic drug, and it made



Jennifer Walter, who has cerebral palsy, has reported more muscle control and as a result, self-confidence since she started receiving ITB Therapy.

a difference. Her speech was better and she could assist her caregivers in transfers between her chair and bed. But Jennifer began experiencing headaches, a common side effect of oral baclofen. Her doctors had to lower her dose, which decreased the effects.

Jennifer and her family considered ITB Therapy (Intrathecal Baclofen Therapy), a treatment that delivers a liquid form of baclofen directly to the fluid surrounding the spinal cord, called the intrathecal space.

Developed by Medtronic, ITB Therapy uses a programmable pump surgically placed just below the skin in the abdomen that is connected to a thin, flexible tube called a catheter. The catheter is threaded beneath the skin into the intrathecal space, where it continuously delivers small doses of the drug Lioresal Intrathecal (baclofen injection) right to where the medication is most effective. The medication does not circulate throughout the body, so potential systemic side effects, such as headaches, drowsiness and nausea, may be minimized. Jennifer, who is very involved with her care, met other people who were receiving the treatment and with her family, she decided that ITB Therapy was the way to go.

In July 2000, Jennifer re-

ceived a screening test for ITB Therapy. A small dose of liquid baclofen was injected into her intrathecal space and during the following hours, she experienced a reduction in her spasticity. As a result of the positive screening test, she underwent a surgical procedure to have a pump placed.

With ITB Therapy, Jennifer and her family have noticed a reduction in her spasticity. As her muscles relaxed, her speech also improved. She is now able to form complete sentences and is more willing to participate in conversations. Jennifer even went to her high school prom, and had the courage to ask someone to dance. "ITB Therapy has had a significant impact on Jennifer's life. She feels more control and self-confidence. She is learning many things for the first time—some things she had tried before but eventually gave up on," her mother, Sue, said.

Jennifer graduated from high school in May 2001, and now attends Lewis & Clark Community College in Godfrey, Ill. where she uses assistive technology—such as a head-controlled mouse—as part of her schoolwork. She's meeting people on campus and is participating in the school's People First chapter. Jennifer also takes art classes and recently had a watercolor painting selected for a national competition.

"Communication has always been difficult, and art has been a new avenue," said Sue. With the help of a personal care assistant, Jennifer rides the bus to school and work; she works two afternoons a week at St. Joseph's Hospital in Highland, Ill., where she delivers interoffice mail.

Jennifer visits her physician every three months to have her pump refilled.

Talk to your doctor for more information about spasticity and Medtronic ITB Therapy. Additional information and a listing of physicians who treat severe spasticity are available at www.spasticity.com.