Medical Breakthroughs

Reducing The Severe Spasticity Associated With Spinal Cord Injury

(NAPSA)—An ordinary rock, half-covered by dry grass and obscured by the speed of his motorcycle, changed Jason Fowler's life forever. A nationally ranked amateur racer, Jason was roaring up a motocross trail when wheel and rock collided. The accident hurled him to the ground head first, severed his spinal cord and left him paralyzed from the chest down. He was 17 years old.

While recovering in the hospital, Jason made plans for the future. His first priority was to remain as active as possible, as soon as possible. His lifelong passion was athletics and, true to form, he began racing again—this time in a wheelchair—only two months after the accident and spinal-fusion surgery.

A month later, however, Jason suffered a major setback: the onset of severe spasticity in his legs and back—a condition marked by tight, stiff muscles that make movement difficult or uncontrollable.

"The spasms were so bad they would throw me backward out of my chair," he says. "Pain from the tightening muscles would shoot up my back. I wasn't able to sleep on my stomach because my legs would contract so much they wouldn't go straight. Everything was really difficult, especially transfers. And sitting in my chair for a long time was impossible."

Oral baclofen, an antispasmodic medication, provided Jason no relief from his spasticity and proved to have negative side effects, including nausea and drowsiness. According to his mother, the medication made Jason act as if he were intoxicated.

With ITB Therapy, Jason Fowler has been able to lead the active life he desires.

Jason continued to get worse. His spasticity was so intense that it knocked his hip out of joint, which could have led to hip degeneration, requiring a hip fusion. He was faced with the possibility of reducing his spasticity with a rhizotomy—cutting of nerves. Jason and his mother, however, were very hesitant about this procedure because it is irreversible and considered destructive.

Dr. Joseph Madsen, a neurosurgeon at Boston Children's Hospital, recommended a screening test for ITB (Intrathecal Baclofen) Therapy. In December 1991, Jason was given a test dose of Lioresal Intrathecal—the liquid form of baclofen. Within a few hours, the medication significantly reduced his spasticity.

The next day, Jason had a programmable pump placed just below the skin of his abdomen. A catheter was connected to the pump and threaded into the intrathecal space where the fluid flows around the spinal cord. Lioresal Intrathecal (baclofen injection) is continuously delivered through the pump and catheter into the intrathecal space where it is most effective.

Jason's legs and back muscles relaxed, and he regained control of his body. The release of his tightly constricted thigh muscles allowed Jason's physicians to manage his hip dislocation easily without a hip fusion.

Being free from spasticity and its related pain enabled Jason to return to the active life he craved. After receiving ITB Therapy, he entered Northeastern University in Boston, where he earned a degree in finance. He has traded motocross racing for wheelchair racing and has completed 22 marathons in the past eight years, including the Boston Marathon and the Beijing Marathon.

Developed by Medtronic, ITB Therapy has helped thousands of people with severe spasticity that experienced intolerable side effects from oral medications and/or found other therapies ineffective. With ITB Therapy, the medication does not circulate throughout the body, so systemic side effects may be minimized.

For more information about severe spasticity and Medtronic ITB Therapy, talk with your physician and visit the Web site at www.spasticity.com.