

The Patient's Perspective

Giving and Taking

Ian Bennett

I am 41 years old and was diagnosed with the rare neurological condition; FSP (Familial Spastic Paraplegia) at the end of 1999. Since February 2002 I have been a patient at Salisbury District hospital, where I have been fortunate enough to be treated with Functional Electrical Stimulation, by as good a medical team as I have ever encountered. Initially my treatment involved a single channel system stimulating my peroneal nerve on my right leg, in a successful attempt to overcome the problem of dropped foot. After familiarising myself with this equipment I changed to a two channel unit, which was used to stimulate both peroneal nerves. By March 2004 I had progressed to a more complicated three channel system. This consisted of a two channel unit stimulating my right peroneal nerve and right glutes, with a single channel unit linked with the two channel unit, to stimulate my left peroneal nerve. It was noticeable and consequently greatly appreciated that this set up enabled me to walk with more stability and much less tripping.

I happily volunteered to donate my body to be stimulated at the FES annual convention on Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th September by delegates who had been learning about the two channel unit. Presumably they had just completed the theory, and this was their first opportunity to put it into practise.

On arriving at Salisbury hospital for the Saturday afternoon session, whilst pinning on my name badge, I was advised by a course tutor that when introduced to course delegates, I should not disclose what my current FES treatment involved.

I was initially placed with three physiotherapists, who had been instructed to watch my walk and then attempt to administer some beneficial stimulation. Initially the three aforementioned physio's stimulated my hamstrings, which was a first. I was very apprehensive while the electrodes were being located accordingly, and the stimulator settings were being adjusted. However, when I tried walking I had to admit that their treatment was of some benefit in as much as it prevented me from hyper extending.

Over the course of the weekend, I was placed with three further groups of delegates, comprising of both physiotherapists and biomedical engineers. I never realised that I could be stimulated in so many places! Without exception, each group administered treatment with varying degrees of benefit.

It was the first group of delegates to whom I was assigned on the Sunday, comprising of a biomedical engineer and a physiotherapist, who administered treatment that very surprisingly seems to be of greater benefit than any FES treatment I have had in the past. After observing my walk, it was decided to stimulate my glutes, but the electrodes were placed in a higher location than I had previously experienced. They set the stimulator in such a way that my right gluteal muscles were stimulated on right heel rise and vice versa. On taking my first step in the gymnasium, I don't think I was alone in my astonishment with the benefit of this particular set up. The Salisbury team who were present, clearly witnessed the improvement in my walking and the look of amazement on my face, and kindly let me take the relevant two channel unit home for further trials.

On my first subsequent trip down to my local town I felt like I was striding around with a new body. It's almost as if there's someone very gently pushing me along and taking most of the effort out of walking. In fact this new treatment is so beneficial that I now set myself up every day, and not as I did in the past, on only the days when I knew I was going to be doing some significant walking.

I can't thank the Salisbury FES team enough for their enthusiastic support over the past 21/2 years and the huge contribution they have made in improving my mobility with the use of FES.

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