

A shot of anti-wrinkle treatment Botox can ease prostate problems, too

JENNY HOPE - 24th May 2007



Botox injections are usually associated with anti-wrinkle treatment for women

Millions of men who suffer from prostate problems could find their symptoms ease with just a single injection of Botox.

Although normally used as an anti-wrinkle treatment, a study has found the product can also improve the quality of life for men with Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia.

This non-cancerous condition affects half of males over 60 and is caused by an abnormally large prostate - a gland situated just below the bladder in men.

When the prostate enlarges, it squeezes the bladder triggering urinary problems, including the need to go to the toilet frequently during the day and at night.

It is a progressive disorder which, if left untreated, can lead to the complete inability to urinate. This, in turn, can cause kidney damage.

Conventional drugs can improve symptoms, but some patients suffer side effects such as impotence or do not respond.

However, a study by scientists in Taiwan and at the American University of Pittsburgh found that just one Botox jab into the prostate eased symptoms and improved quality of life for three out of four men up to a year later.

The findings were presented at the American Urological Association in California.

Professor Michael Chancellor, of the University of Pittsburgh, said: "Our results are encouraging because they indicate that Botox could represent a simple, safe and effective treatment for enlarged prostate that has long-term benefits."

In all, 37 men with BPH that had not responded to standard treatment received injections of Botox directly into their prostate glands.

Up to a year later, 27 men - almost three quarters - had a 30 per cent improvement in urinary tract symptoms and quality of life.

Patients did not experience any significant side effects.

Researcher Dr Yao-Chuang said Botox reduces the size of the prostate gland through a process called apoptosis, in which the prostate cells die in a programmed way.

This reduction in size can improve urine flow and decrease residual urine left in the bladder.

Botox is the brand name of a product consisting of botulinum toxin-A.

The latest study was funded by its makers Allergan.

Although known for its cosmetic benefits, Botox can also treat excessive sweating, ease the pain of migraine and bladder problems, help control Parkinson's disease tremors and control heel pain.

A recent study suggested it combats back pain, while there have been promising results from trials on children with cerebral palsy aimed at relaxing muscles to help them walk.

Those with facial ticks, squints, writer's cramp and involuntary spasms of the head and neck have also benefited.

Dr Chris Hiley, head of policy and research at the Prostate Cancer Charity, said: "The use of botulinum toxin A is an area of increasing research interest.

"There is a great need to improve the range of treatment options for men with BPH – an extremely common problem which causes urinary problems for older men which can severely limit quality of life.

"Any promise that this new treatment holds will be keenly assessed by doctors the world over."

Ministers accused of 'bottling out' of strict botox rules

JENNY HOPE - 25th April 2007



Consumer groups fear self-regulation of Botox may not be enough to keep high standards

Fears that people could be left scarred for life by cowboy beauticians were raised after the Government refused to issue tighter controls on Botox.

Doctors were demanding regulations be introduced amidst fears that the anti-wrinkle treatment was being given out at so-called "Botox parties".

But ministers have announced they have decided to allow the industry to police itself which led to calls they had "bottled out".

Botox - a nerve poison and the same bacteria that causes botulism food poisoning - is increasingly popular to improve the appearance of wrinkles.

It can only be prescribed by a doctor, dentist, specially-qualified nurse or pharmacist and administered by injection under their direction.

But growing concern that these rules are being flouted has fuelled calls for better controls.

More than two years ago the Expert Group on the Regulation of Cosmetic Surgery said it was worried about off-licence use and recommended Botox treatments should be monitored by the Healthcare Commission to safeguard patient safety.

However, plans for the industry to set up a scheme for regulating itself were set out by Health Minister Lord Hunt, who promised to review its success.

He said "While I have every confidence that self regulation is the best way forward for non-surgical cosmetic treatments at this moment in time, we do not completely rule out the introduction of statutory regulation should it become necessary in the future."

Consumer group Which? said it was disappointing the Government had failed to move further.

Britons spent almost £360 million on cosmetic treatments in 2005, and it is estimated around two-thirds of 70,000 cosmetic procedures carried out every year involve non-surgical treatments like botox.

Jenny Driscoll, health campaigner at Which?, said "Government regulation for the cosmetic treatments industry is essential, so how disappointing that it has decided to bottle out and simply leave it up to the cosmetic treatments industry to make itself safe.

"There's an increasingly casual approach to non-surgical treatments - just look at Botox parties, where people are encouraged to drink champagne before going under the needle.

"This is a boom sector and our concern is that the rush to make money may result in some businesses cutting corners.

"The Government needs to step in now because, left to regulate itself, it'd be all too easy for the industry to focus on introducing multiple codes that will just end up confusing people.

"We'll be keeping a close eye on the industry and calling on the Government to take further action if needed."

Dr Andrew Vallance-Owen, BUPA medical director and chairman of the Independent Healthcare Advisory Services' Working Group on Cosmetic Surgery, said "There is no question that better control of these facilities is needed.

"We are talking about invasive procedures. Botox is a prescription-only medicine and patient safety should be paramount.

"If things go wrong, some patients could be left scarred physically or psychologically for life."

He said under current rules, almost anyone could set up shop in the local high street, don a white coat and start offering dermal fillers or arranging Botox parties.

"He said 'If we, the industry, don't step in these procedures will be less-regulated than ear-piercing.

"Self-regulation is better than no regulation. If we want the sector to maintain its success we must retain patient confidence."

A scheme for self-regulation will be set out by the Independent Healthcare Advisory Services, which counts many of the major cosmetic surgery providers as members.

Its director, Sally Taber, said "We are prepared to take the lead in setting up a self-regulatory scheme and look forward to working with other key stakeholders and in particular patient and consumer organisations.

"Despite our belief that statutory regulation is the right way forward, IHAS has assured Lord Hunt that the working group under the chairmanship of Dr Andrew Vallance-Owen is prepared to drive the initiative to ensure improved patient safety and ethical practices/behaviour in this expanding market."

Last year, doctors issued a warning about the dangers of using excessively high doses of botulinum toxin.

The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) detailed four cases where patients were given doses several times higher than the estimated lethal dose.