

Coffee Evening at Leeds Teaching Hospitals for Patients Awaiting Spinal Column Stimulation (SCS)

Why a Coffee Evening?

As part of the care pathway for provision of spinal cord stimulation (SCS), an information session is provided prior to offering patients a place on the neuromodulation waiting list. This session enables the Clinical Nurse specialists (CNSs) to discuss the principles, benefits and risks of SCS, the surgical procedure and after care. It enables a demonstration of the equipment and offers an opportunity for patients to discuss the information and their concerns.

A recent patient satisfaction survey, undertaken by the CNSs, revealed that although patients found the information session most useful, they would also have liked an exchange with patients who have experience of this therapy. The challenge for the team was to establish an appropriate forum that would enable these discussions to take place. It was not deemed appropriate to provide direct contact telephone numbers; equally, evidence from social media network sites clearly demonstrates the need for more controlled patient information and direct exchange amongst patients on this subject.

The aim of our initiative was to provide articulate, appropriate communication on matters of SCS in a safe and time-limited environment. A coffee evening format was chosen to allow patients and volunteers to meet on safe and neutral territory to talk in an informal meeting over a cup of coffee.

Who is Invited to the Coffee Evening?

All patients who are currently on the waiting list for an SCS trial or a full implant are invited to attend. Patients are selected according to NICE guidance for SCS implantation.

The Leeds Neuromodulation Service implants various neuromodulation devices sourced from a number of companies. The patients will know the system they will be receiving based on clinical reasoning and evidence. It is essential for patients to have familiarised themselves with the relevant information.

How did we select the Volunteers?

The volunteers for the coffee evenings have been selected from the pool of current Leeds SCS patients. These volunteers have been chosen because they are easy to talk with, articulate in their ability to describe their experiences and willing to freely give up some of their time to meet our new patients. Currently the service has over 20 excellent volunteers who between them have the experience of the full range of implants that Leeds Pain Management Services provide. This approach has been expanded to other areas of pain management, we are fortunate to have a number of specialist volunteers who can share their experiences of withdrawing from long term opiates and managing specific pain syndromes.

Where is the Coffee Evening held?

The Coffee Evenings are currently held on site at Seacroft hospital from 7-8 pm. The format is to introduce the volunteers and inform the guest patients that they have only one hour to mingle with the volunteers and ask as many questions as they would like to. At the end of the hour, the meeting is closed. Limiting the meeting to one hour only has helped the volunteers to plan their time and has helped to focus patients' questions.

What are the Coffee evening outcomes?

The first six coffee evenings proved a great success with both the patients and volunteers alike. In addition, the meetings have spurred a number of potential future service improvements. For example, it is planned to utilise the experience of one of our specialist volunteers to make a patient information video about chronic pain and withdrawal from opiates. Several of the volunteers have been selected to speak about their experiences at local and national seminars.

It was also observed that the coffee evenings have spurred a wider need for social interaction. Patients expressed the desire to meet again, potentially at regular intervals throughout the year, for a coffee and a general chat. Chronic pain can be socially isolating and it appears that both patients and carers enjoy support from others who have shared similar experiences.

For further detail about this project, please contact Mrs Carol Bourke (carol.bourke@nhs.net), Specialist Nurse or Dr G Baranidharan (g.baranidharan@nhs.net), Consultant in Pain Medicine, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.