

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

An Elusive, Debilitating Ailment

Lisa Parks, 34, of Gurnee, remembers when she first experienced the symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS).

"I was standing at the sink on my son's birthday and I felt like I had to lie down but I didn't know if I could make it to the couch. My heart was racing and I was dizzy," said Lisa, the mother of two boys ages 6 and 3. "I laid down that day and I didn't get up for ten weeks."

This incident occurred in May of 1992. Since then, Lisa has sought the expertise of at least seven physicians to find a reason and cure for her lingering, flu-like illness. Each diagnosis has been as varied as a virus to allergies and she has been prescribed an array of medications ranging from antibiotics to anti-depressants.

None of these treatments, however, seemed to

have any affect on Lisa's physical condition. About twice a year, for weeks at a time Lisa was still experiencing debilitating effects of chronic tiredness, sore throat and irritability – all common symptoms of CFS. "You constantly feel like you're about to get the flu, but you never get it," Lisa said. Even in between the bouts, Lisa said she never recovers 100 percent.

CFS is a disorder which is characterized by the sudden onset of extreme fatigue together with symptoms such as fever, sore throat, painful lymph nodes, weakness, muscle aches, headaches, depression, sleep disturbances, memory difficulties and confusion. These symptoms can persist for six months to many years and can dramatically reduce a person's quality of life. There is much scientific debate about the cause and identity of CFS.

"You feel guilty because you're down," said Lisa, referring especially to spending time with her two sons. "You can't do much and you feel like

you've missed out on a lot." Lisa recalls an incident last Christmas when she planned on taking the boys to see Santa Claus but was too tired to go.

Lisa is luckier than some because she has an understanding and supportive family. Days when she is really under-the-weather, Lisa's mother-in-law will watch the kids for her, and Lisa's husband, when he is not traveling for work, helps out how ever he can. In fact, it was Lisa's husband who saw Mercy Hospital's Drs. Sigata and Audrius Plioplys, of the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Evaluation and Treatment Center at Mercy, featured on WBBM's Channel 2 newscast.

Lisa has long suspected she might have CFS, so she made an appointment to see Dr. Audrius Plioplys. In May, after Dr. Plioplys reviewed her medical history and performed a physical exam and Lisa underwent blood and urine tests and a brain scan, he confirmed a diagnosis of CFS.

This meant Lisa was eligible to participate in Mercy's CFS treatment study. The physicians are clinically investigating the use of L-carnitine and amantadine in treating CFS patients. In certain cases, these medications have been linked to dramatic improvements in fatigue and energy levels.

After taking L-carnitine for only a couple of weeks, Lisa said she has noticed a slight increase in her energy level. For the first time, Lisa said she is optimistic that relief is in sight. "By participating in research protocols, CFS patients benefit directly from latest medical advances and in addition help to define better treatments for other CFS patients in the future," said Dr. Sigata Plioplys, who is organizing the studies.

Drs. Sigata and Audrius Plioplys are also conducting an investigation into whether abnormalities in Mitochondria (the energy factories in our bodies) are a cause of CFS.

Patients, like Lisa, who are experiencing the CFS symptoms described earlier can also find help at Mercy's Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Evaluation and Treatment Center. "We are dedicated to providing service to patients, to investigating the cause of this condition and to offering new diagnostic and treatment possibilities," said Dr. Audrius Plioplys, who is board certified in neurology. "At Mercy Hospital, we have a full complement of specialists who can be called upon for advise including rheumatologists, infectious disease experts, hematologists and psychiatrists."

For more information on the center or to make an appointment, please call Mercy's Customer Service Center at (312) 567-2600.



To make appointments or to obtain further information, please call (312) 445-0123.

--Sigita Plioplys, MD,
Clinical Research Specialist

--Audrius V. Plioplys, MD, FRCPC,
Director

ing experiences she went through with various physicians before getting diagnosed, and her treatment. This patient certainly captured the interest and attention of the health care professionals in the audience.



MORE TELEVISION COVERAGE

On May 13, 1994, a segment of a WBBM-TV (Channel 2) health series called "WHY AM I SO TIRED?" featured chronic fatigue syndrome as the topic of interest on the 10:00 news. Dr. Terri Hamilton interviewed Drs. Andy and Sigita Plioplys at the CFS Center at Mercy Hospital. Also featured on this segment was our very own Mary Jo Franciskovich. In this segment CFS was portrayed with a great deal of compassion, sensitivity, and understanding by the journalists.

--Ruth Robin



MUSCLE MITOCHONDRIAL ABNORMALITIES IN CFS: AN ELECTRON MICROSCOPIC INVESTIGATION

CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME EVALUATION AND TREATMENT CENTER located at Mercy Hospital and Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois, (312) 445-0123

Researchers in Scotland have reported electron microscopic abnormalities in muscle mitochondria in over 70% of CFS patients. These are very important results because mitochondria are the energy producing centers in our cells. They are literally the power plants of our bodies. Abnormalities in mitochondria may produce fatigue and may be the cause of many symptoms experienced by CFS patients.

This is an important study because it may help to understand the cause of CFS and may lead to new treatments. Also, if our results are similar to those in Scotland, this procedure could be used as a diagnostic marker for CFS. A diagnostic marker would be of immense importance when one has to deal with insurance companies and disability determination boards.

We are offering this diagnostic test

to our patients free of cost. The commercial medical cost of this procedure would be between \$1,000 and \$2,000. This study was approved by the Mercy Hospital Institutional Review Board and is financially supported by a grant from the CFS Association of Minnesota.

Once the initial medical evaluation is completed, the study procedure includes a more detailed psychologic interview which takes about one hour, followed by a needle biopsy. Local anesthetic is injected under the skin in one spot on the outside portion of the right thigh. A needle is inserted into that muscle and a small piece of muscle is removed through the needle. There will be a sensation of pressure when the needle is inserted and almost no pain. The procedure itself takes 2 to 3 seconds. Afterwards a bandage would have to be worn overnight.

NOTE: to obtain scientifically valid results it is important for each CFS patient to be accompanied by a healthy volunteer of the same sex and approximately the same age. That volunteer would undergo a brief medical examination, the one hour psychologic review and the needle muscle biopsy. We cannot do a biopsy on a CFS patient without a volunteer undergoing the biopsy at the same time. That is mandated by our research protocol. There will be no exceptions to this rule.

We can only accept a maximum of 30 patients and 30 control volunteers for this study. Prompt registration is encouraged.

We will give preference to the patients whom we have already seen. We will accept new patients for this study. New patients will first have to undergo a routine medical consultation and if necessary, diagnostic tests may be ordered. Routine medical fees will apply for this initial consultation and laboratory testing. The bills will be submitted to insurance carriers. The subsequent biopsy would be free of cost.

Once the study is completed, each CFS patient will receive a summary of the study results along with an individual report about their muscle biopsy result. This will be a medically and legally binding document that then may be used for insurance and disability determination purposes.

CFS AWARENESS ACTIVITIES CONTINUE

CFS Awareness Month was officially over on April 1, 1994. The impetus, that started in March, though, continued right on through April and May.



MORE GRAND ROUNDS

On April 15, 1994, Drs. Andy and Sigita Plioplys gave Grand Rounds before the Department of Medicine at Mercy Hospital. On May 20 they gave Grand Rounds before the Department of Neurology at the University of Illinois Medical Center. Both presentations were well attended by interns, residents, and medical staff members. At each presentation they brought a CFS patient who answered questions regarding her history, the terribly agoniz-