

Consultants wake up to pioneering procedure

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Patients are remaining awake during complex operations and going home quicker because of pioneering work in the North West by a Lancashire hospital.



Royal Preston Hospital, part of Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, is believed to be the first hospital in the region to routinely undertake nerve blocking using real time ultrasound imaging – in which the patient remains awake during an operation - instead of administering traditional general anaesthesia. It also allows more patients to have a complex operation and go home the same day.

The ultrasound machine is used to clearly see the nerves and needle to ensure that the local anaesthetic is accurately injected to block feeling in the nerves.

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals has invested £100,000 to purchase three special high quality compact ultrasound

machines to provide ultrasound imaging guidance for nerve blocking before surgery.

A number of consultant anaesthetists at the Trust have undergone national and international training courses to develop skills in the use of ultrasound to assist with performing regional nerve blocks.

The special anaesthetic procedure is being used for scores of shoulder, hand and wrist operations at Royal Preston Hospital. Around 300 patients have already benefited from the technique since its introduction.

Dr Tony Adams, Consultant Anaesthetist, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said: "Having the surgery performed under a block avoids the risks of a general anaesthetic plus patients don't experience post-operative nausea and vomiting and their faster recovery times mean that they are discharged earlier.

"It is a highly skilled procedure. Ultrasound enables us to see the nerves and the needle tip to inject local anaesthetic around the nerves. We can also see and avoid the major adjacent structures, such as the lungs, veins and arteries."

He added: "Although patients remain awake during the procedure, they are behind screens and don't see the operation being performed and they can bring in their own music or listen to an ipod while the surgeon is at work."

Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon Mike Woodruff, a specialist hand and wrist surgeon, has been undertaking complex hand and wrist operations with patients who have had a regional nerve block, said: "This is a technique I became familiar with whilst training as a Hand and Wrist surgeon in Leeds. Having experienced the benefits of the technique as a trainee, I was extremely keen to introduce the technique into my practice at Lancashire Teaching Hospitals. To my knowledge no other hospital in the region has rolled out this technique but at Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust we have surgeons routinely performing complex operations while the patient remains awake.

"It is very safe and has less side effects for patients. We can perform more operations because we do not have to wait for patients to be put to sleep and then brought round from a general anaesthetic which helps keep waiting lists down."

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Notes to Editors: For further information please call Press and PR Officer Craig Noonan on 01772 522727.