



# Alliance Surgical surgeon pioneers new back pain technique

Advances in curing back pain have been developed by spinal surgeons at Llandough hospital in Cardiff. The new technique has never before been used on facet joints to alleviate lower back pain.

Alliance Surgical Founder Member Mr Alwyn Jones, Consultant Spinal Surgeon and Medical Director in Avon and South Wales, is at the forefront of this innovative new spinal procedure, developing and performing facet coblation as an alternative to open surgery.

The new treatment involves killing off nerves that transmit the pain message to the brain by using low heat radio frequency waves to heat the tissues to 40–70 degrees. Mr Jones and his fellow spinal surgeons were the first in the country to use the technique on facet joints.

The complexity of spinal innervations and 'hard-to-diagnose' causes of back pain in the lumbar region of the spine means this new treatment will be greatly welcomed.

Mr Jones' patient, Mark 46, suffered from lower back pain. This started originally as a dull ache and feeling of stiffness after exercise; the pain gradually worsened leaving him unable to do the simplest of household chores. Painkillers were no longer helping.

Following an MRI scan it was unclear whether deteriorating discs or facet joint cartilage were to blame, both effected naturally with age. Steroid injections into the facet joint alleviated the pain and finally identified the problem as facet joints rather than discs.

Facet joints come in pairs and connect vertebrae with the discs allowing some flexibility to bend and twist, in Mark's condition these were grinding on each other causing the

pain. Mr Jones carried out facet joint coblation while Mark was sedated. From the x-ray image guidance, he was able to identify the suspect facet joint and inserted a large needle into position two inches below the skin. A smaller coblation needle could then be extended from the tip of the needle to accurately target a small area of nerves on the outer border of the facet joint.

No stitches were needed and Mark resumed normal life as soon as he felt comfortable enough to do so. "Some patients will notice an immediate improvement in their back pain while for others, the pain may not subside for a month or two. Up to 75% of patients are still improved after two years!" Mr Alwyn Jones stated.

"The alternative would have been to weld (fuse) together the vertebrae causing Mark the pain, which inhibits spinal movement and may not resolve the joint pain." Mr Jones further commented, "the advantage of coblation is an 80% chance of getting rid of back pain." All without the need for open surgery.

For Mark, the treatment has vastly improved his quality of life, "I've felt very good ever since - I still get the odd painful twinge but otherwise it's a 90% improvement."



Mr Alwyn Jones, Consultant Spinal Surgeon