

A trip to Stafford could change Swedish Egil's life

By Kerry Ashdown

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A SWEDISH man has travelled thousands of miles to a Stafford hospital for life-changing treatment.

Egil Kuam, 74, has been struggling to swallow, eat and drink for more than a year and requires a feeding tube for nutrition.

He was found to be suffering the effects of aspergillus, a fungus which can cause infections, in September 2011, and was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a type of bone marrow cancer, in March 2009.

But he now has the potential to enjoy a new lease of life thanks to a revolutionary new treatment, Vital-Stem, which is being offered by Sumanthi Sinnappan at Rowley Hall Hospital.

The therapy, which originated in the US, is a specialised form of neuromuscular electrical stimulation (NMES) designed to treat dysphagia (difficulty in swallowing) through muscle re-education.

A small electrical current

is delivered by electrodes placed on the neck and the current stimulates motor nerves in the throat while the patient practises swallowing

exercises that cause the swallowing muscles to contract. With repeated therapy the muscles can be re-educated and swallowing function improved.

NMES has previously been used by physical therapists for several years to treat larger muscles in the legs, arms and shoulders.

Mr Kuam and wife Tyth discovered therapists were using the treatment to tackle his condition and an internet search revealed the nearest venue to their home in Sweden was Stafford.

Within weeks the couple flew to the UK for Mr Kuam to start his first course of treatment. And after just one session the pair were delighted to see improvement in Mr Kuam's swallowing abilities and speech.

Mrs Kuam said: "It is like a miracle and even if this is the only result it is worth it."

"The condition has been devastating and it affects everybody, not just Egil. It is like a domino effect."

Dysphagia not only has the potential to cause life-threatening aspirational pneumonia - food or saliva passing down the windpipe and into the lungs but can affect quality of life for patients too.



WORTH IT... Sumanthi Sinnappan helps Egil Kuam to learn how to swallow again.

Those with feeding tubes may experience discomfort and a reduction in social activities, due to inconvenience or pain, and depression as normal activities are disrupted.

But Mrs Sinnappan is determined to improve life for her patients at Rowley Hall.

"I have been offering this treatment since 2007 - at this hospital since 2009. I am the only person in the country to provide it", she said.

"I am passionate about my work. Eating and swallowing are an integral part of life - you meet people in cafes and it dents your self-esteem and confidence if you are unable to manage your secretion. Then depression sets in because you are not getting out and about."

"Patients come from all over for the treatment and I also support them via email, monitoring how they are eating and how they are coping."

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