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New Drug Hoping To Heal Diabetic Foot Ulcers

Drug Could Prevent Amputation

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BOSTON -- A top Boston hospital is testing a new treatment for diabetic foot ulcers. It's a complication of diabetes that can lead to amputation. News Center 5's Liz Brunner reported Tuesday how the treatment may save limbs and lives. For Walter Perry, walking down a hospital hallway is a challenge. "My feet seem to get tired on me," Perry said.

Perry has had type-2 diabetes for 15 years, but it is his foot ulcers that have led to six surgeries.

"I've lost the middle toe on both feet and partial bones on my big toe," he said. Diabetics are at an increased risk of developing foot problems. When patients like Perry lose feeling in their feet, they can develop ulcers that can get infected and lead to amputation.

"It can be anywhere between 25 and 60 percent of folks with diabetes can develop neuropathy," said Dr. Ken Snow, the chief of adult diabetes at Joslin Diabetes Center. "Last year we had well over 100,000 amputations just in the diabetic population." said Dr. Vickie Driver, a foot care specialist and the director of clinical research at Boston Medical Center.

Doctors who treat diabetes are hoping a new DNA-based gel, called "Excellerate," will help ulcers heal faster, preventing amputation. Boston Medical Center is one of 25 hospitals investigating the new drug.

"It's helping the wounds close faster," Driver said. "If we can get the wounds closed faster, we avoid the dreaded infection, hospitalization, the surgery."

Perry has been receiving the treatment for a month. His wounds are cleaned once a week, the gel is applied, and his foot is wrapped up in a boot that alleviates the pressure on the ulcer.

Because this is a clinical trial, Perry has a four in seven chance of receiving the drug. Though he doesn't know if he's getting the drug or not, he has noticed an improvement in his ulcers.

"The ulcer seems to be closing a lot better now than it was before," Perry said.

Driver believes that the drug is doing more than just healing the ulcers.

"This is not just saving limbs, this is prolonging life," Driver said.

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