

Winning step by step: PARA Talk 2024

The treatment with Nogo-A antibody shows strong signals in patients with incomplete Spinal Cord Injuries (SCI). Administered early and throughout the first 6 weeks post SCI, they show improved motor scores and functional independence on those patients with preserved tissue bridges around the site of spinal injury. Prof. Dr. Patrick Freund was able to report on this partial success at the PARA Talk held on July 4th by the IRP - International Foundation for Research in Paraplegia. Thanks to this evening, over CHF 20'000.- net will go towards further basic research.

The beautifully paneled hall on the second floor of the now wheelchair-accessible *ZunftHaus zur Zimmerleuten* on Limmatquai in the middle of Zurich was well filled. Interested parties from research as well as donors and sponsors learned that even a little can go a long way when it comes to the ability of the spinal cord to regenerate. Affected individuals with incomplete cervical spinal cord injuries become more independent in everyday life and at work when their largely paralyzed hands and arms show improved recovery. Philipp Kutter, National Councillor and living with a cervical spinal cord injury, who was also present, listened attentively.

Spinal cord regeneration remains the goal

Nogo-A antibodies as being discovered by Prof M. Schwab and early on supported by IRP grants promotes functional recovery in patients with incomplete cervical injuries, a Phase II double-blind study has now shown the following: 127 patients with acute cervical SCI across Europe took part in the study which was led by Prof Armin Curt, the former director of the spinal cord injury center Balgrist. Those who received the active substance and not the placebo recovered better functionally. Prof. Patrick Freund reported on this with satisfaction. At the same time, he pointed out that there is still a long way to go before Nogo-A antibodies are approved for the treatment of acute spinal cord injury. However, the regeneration-oriented approach discovered by Prof. Martin Schwab and supported early on by the IRP remains unique and promising.

Neurosurgery provides support and assistance

Electrical stimulation approaches, such as those developed by French scientist Grégoire Courtine and neurosurgeon Jocelyne Bloch, have shown some signs of improvements as well. The wheelchair athlete and sports teacher Dave Mzee gave a lively and entertaining account of this. As an incomplete tetraplegic who was injured in an accident, he underwent such a procedure after his initial rehabilitation. After a long period of training, he can now walk a few hundred meters again with a rollator. But it is exhausting. He spoke in a wheelchair.

Further research also remains challenging. It is almost exclusively privately funded. The IRP Foundation remains reliant on donors and sponsors to provide it with heartfelt support. This is the only way that its high-caliber scientific committee can select the best projects from the many available.

Thanks to the interested participants, donors and sponsors, a net sum of over CHF 20'000.- has been collected at this event and is now available for further research work. Thank you very much!