

Israeli medics develop miracle MS treatment for 'patient 31' Mark Lewis

A TV documentary crew followed media lawyer Mark Lewis as he underwent a revolutionary new treatment for Multiple Sclerosis



A prominent Jewish lawyer has taken part in a ground-breaking clinical trial at Israel's Hadassah hospital that offers treatment which could finally offer a "miraculous" cure for the 2.5 million sufferers of multiple-sclerosis.

Mark Lewis — best known as the media lawyer who took on Rupert Murdoch over the newspaper phone-hacking scandal — is one of 48 patients to have participated in the revolutionary year-long trial at the internationally renowned hospital in Jerusalem.

At the Israeli hospital, Mr Lewis was injected with stem cells derived from his own bone marrow, directly into the spinal fluid.

Speaking to the *JC* before a Channel 4 documentary this week about his treatment, he said he had benefited immediately afterwards from "a miraculous 60 per cent improvement in my condition".

He added: "Within minutes I had feeling and movement back that I had not had for years."

"The Herzl quote they speak about a lot in Israel sums it up," he said. " 'If you will it, it is no dream' ."

The 52 year-old lawyer has been unable to walk without the use of a stick, tie his shoelaces or do up his cufflinks as a result of the disease, which was diagnosed when he was aged 24.

Mr Lewis praised the pioneering Israeli technology used by the multi-faith medical team at the university hospital at Ein Kerem. "The trial is the complete antithesis to BDS," he said. "It is Israeli technology treating everybody with a team that has no concept of religion, nationality or whatever.

"It is purely about helping people, whoever and whatever they are — no matter what god they do or do not believe in."

Mr Lewis said the sense of unity among the medical team was striking. "The leading professor was born in Greece and is Christian but is now an Israeli citizen. There was a Muslim doctor, there was someone from the former Soviet Union and there was a specialist who is the sister of someone known to be an Israeli 'settler'.

"But all I noticed was this real sense of everybody pulling together to try and crack this thing."



Research into the treatment's efficacy for MS patients began at the Hadassah in 2007. It was one of the first experiments in which advances in stem cell treatments were applied to neurological diseases.

By a stroke of luck, Mr Lewis was holidaying in Israel nine years later when he heard from a friend that the hospital was seeking patients for the full-time trial.

Since being diagnosed with MS, Mr Lewis's symptoms have grown progressively worse and he feared he would have to give up work within a few years. His life expectancy was put at just 65 years.

Mr Lewis said the first thing he did on flying out to Israel to begin the trial was to visit the Kotel to say prayers.

The procedure involved two rounds of gruelling treatment and was "double blind" — meaning none of the patients or the staff knew which patients had the stem cells injected or which had the placebo.

So far 42 patients have taken part in the trial at the medical unit in Jerusalem, with a final six still waiting to begin.

The treatment is extremely painful for the patient. In order to be injected directly into the spinal fluid doctors insert the needle, which is four inches long, between the patient's vertebrae.

"I cannot describe to you the pain," Mr Lewis said. "That injection took about one hour and 20 minutes — I thought I was going to faint."

The patient's own bone-marrow stem cells are first extracted, then enhanced and then injected into the spinal cord.

Each patient then undergoes monthly neurological evaluations including MRI scans and techniques to detect neuro-regeneration.

In addition, electrophysiological and visual tests are performed of patients' brains with up to five complete neuro-cognitive evaluations performed for each patient.

Mr Lewis was given emotional support during the exhaustive trial both from the hospital's trained team of psychologists and his partner Mandy Blumenthal who travelled out to Jerusalem to be by his side.

Hadassah says the overall cost of the trial for all 48 patients is around £2.4 million. The trial will be concluded in July 2018 providing an outstanding £500,000 of funding can be found.

Professor Karussis Dimitrios, Hadassah's internationally renowned neuroimmunologist, will then write a report on the results allowing other medical facilities around the world to use the findings.

Mr Lewis says that some of the initial positive responses to the treatment have now begun to fade and he believes another shot of injections would bring similar benefits.

"Think of it in the same way as if you were suffering from diabetes. You wouldn't just be given one insulin shot and then told you were finished being treated.

"The treatment was over a year ago now – and I am ready for another shot. But that may never happen of course. It depends on the final results of the trial and the goodwill of the hospital."

But Mr Lewis has been left reassured by the fact that the medical team at the Hadassah now describe him as "one of the strongest patients ever seen in this test".

***The Search for a Miracle Cure* airs tonight (Thursday November 23) at 10pm and will then be available on demand**