

## **Early Treatment is Key to Overcoming the Limitations of Spasticity**

February 21, 2014 (WHEATON, IL) - Spasticity is a condition that commonly occurs as a result of traumatic brain injury, stroke, spinal cord injury, multiple sclerosis, or cerebral palsy. When the nerves fail to send messages properly to the muscles of the arms and legs, the result is tight, stiff muscles that spasm, making movement difficult, painful, and, at times, uncontrollable. Spasticity limits the ability to perform everyday activities such as dressing, eating, bathing, and writing. Walking can become a challenge as spasticity may interfere with balance.

### **The Signs of Spasticity**

Individuals may not recognize the signs of spasticity immediately, since they can be subtle. “Muscles are usually flaccid before they become spastic,” explains Dr. Anjum Sayyad, Medical Director of the Brain Injury Program at Marianjoy. “The spasms or tightness do not always happen in a dramatic, sudden way where the individual’s arm or leg is constantly constricting. At first, they may notice that their fist clenches and that they are having trouble holding onto or reaching for objects.” Some individuals feel pain in the affected extremity. Spasms may also occur at night and disrupt sleep.

As spasticity progresses, contractures can also occur. This refers to the permanent shortening of the muscles and tendons that can result in a tight arm that is twisted up against the chest; the stiffening or tightening of the upper or lower limbs; or a “catching” feeling in the arm or leg during quick movements.

### **Early Treatment is Key**

According to Dr. Sayyad, the key to treating spasticity successfully is to start treatment early to improve function and ambulation; reduce pain; and prevent complications. There are a variety of treatment options available through the Marianjoy Spasticity Clinic. “The treatment plan is tailored to an individual’s specific needs,” explains Dr. Sayyad. “By performing a thorough evaluation and physical assessment, we can measure the patient’s muscular movements and abilities. The results of the evaluation enable us to consider a range of treatment options that may be appropriate.”

### **Treatment options may include:**

- **Rehabilitation Therapy:** Physical and occupational therapy may be recommended for stretching the affected arm or leg; positioning; and movement exercises.
- **Oral Medications:** Medications can relieve the effects of spasticity, but they are usually prescribed in conjunction with other treatments for optimum results.
- **Injection Therapy:** Botulinum toxin (BOTOX<sup>®</sup>) is a natural substance that is injected directly into spastic muscle tissue. It inhibits the muscle spasms and is widely accepted for use in treating localized spasticity. BOTOX<sup>®</sup> may also be used with splinting and orthotics to enhance the stretching effect.
- **Intrathecal Baclofen Therapy:** To control severe spasticity, a small, surgically implanted baclofen pump delivers a time-released dose of medication directly into the spinal fluid via a catheter. The pump is monitored closely by the physician to determine the most effective dosage.

### **Controlling Spasticity**

Dr. Sayyad confirms that some patients see results with just one treatment, while others require a long-term, aggressive approach. “Spasticity can change over time. Although there may not be a cure, with the right treatment, we can achieve positive results. It’s important that the patient be evaluated and medically managed, as spasticity can also intensify over the years. Our goal at the Marianjoy Spasticity Clinic is to improve a patient’s comfort and functional independence.”

### **Can the Marianjoy Spasticity Clinic Help You?**

If you are experiencing tight, stiff muscles or muscle spasms in conjunction with any one of the following symptoms, the Marianjoy Spasticity Clinic can help:

- Fatigue
- Mild to severe pain
- Difficulty walking, eating, dressing, bathing, or sleeping
- Weight loss
- Safety issues/risk for falls

The Marianjoy Medical Group physicians are experts at treating spasticity. Patients experiencing spasticity can be seen at the Wheaton campus, Oakbrook Terrace, Downers Grove, and Palos Heights locations.

### **To Schedule an Appointment**

Patients must have a written prescription from a physician requesting a spasticity consult. To schedule an evaluation appointment and discuss possible treatment and management options, please call 630-909-7000. Prescriptions may be brought to the first appointment or faxed to 630-909-7002.

For more information about Marianjoy's Spasticity Clinic, please visit [www.marianjoy.org/TherapiesandServices/SpasticityClinic.aspx](http://www.marianjoy.org/TherapiesandServices/SpasticityClinic.aspx)

### **About Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital**

Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital is a nonprofit teaching hospital in Wheaton, Illinois, dedicated to the delivery of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation programs, including stroke, neuromuscular, orthopedic, brain injury, spinal cord injury, and pediatrics. Marianjoy's state-of-the-art, 128-private-room hospital is designed to provide rehabilitative care in a naturally holistic setting. Founded in 1972, Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital maintains an extensive network of inpatient, subacute, and outpatient sites, as well as physician clinics throughout the Chicago area. Marianjoy is a member of Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare. To learn more, visit [www.marianjoy.org](http://www.marianjoy.org).