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Press Release

“ONE SHOW” FOCUSES ON COMPLEX REGIONAL PAIN SYNDROME RESEARCH AT THE BATH BASED RNHRD

The Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS Foundation Trust (RNHRD) will tonight feature in the BBC’s popular One Show programme to highlight the Trust’s groundbreaking research into how to reduce pain and other symptoms associated with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS).

The RNHRD, known locally as the ‘Min’, is currently undertaking a trial using a virtual reality system called MIRAGE, short for Mirrors and Genius, developed by Dr Roger Newport of the University of Nottingham, to understand if visual illusions can have an effect in reducing pain and other symptoms of CRPS.

People with CRPS perceive their painful limb as being different in size and shape to reality. The research project, led by Dr Jenny Lewis, Senior Clinical Occupational Therapist at the RNHRD and programme lead for the Trust's CRPS service, focuses on people who have CRPS in a hand or arm.

Dr Lewis says, “We don’t know what causes CRPS, pain may start for no apparent reason or following injury to the limb, such as a fracture. Whereas pain would normally settle as the injury heals, in CRPS intense pain continues and spreads beyond the original site of the injury, there may also be altered temperature and colour changes and impaired movement of the painful limb.”

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Dr Lewis explains “MIRAGE can create a computer-generated visual illusion to change the appearance of the painful hand. In CRPS the way in which the brain represents the painful limb is no longer normal, however these brain changes are reversible, so correcting the way the brain processes information from seeing the changed appearance of the hand may have a powerful effect on treating pain.

Michael Cannell has CRPS and is taking part in the MIRAGE trial, he says. “Only specialists and other sufferers appreciate how hard it is to cope with such a life changing condition, not just the physical pain but also the mental strain of not being able to achieve normal day to day tasks.”

Michael continues, “In my case, CRPS makes my right arm feel very heavy and greater in size to my left arm, I have constant pain as well feelings of extreme hot and cold, swelling and numbness. With a flick of the switch the MIRAGE system makes my brain think all is well in my hand and arm. I am really pleased to be involved in any research which helps achieve a better understanding of CRPS.”

BBC One Show presenter Dr Michael Mosley spent a morning in Bath, demonstrating an optical illusion with passersby to prove how what we see can sometimes override our other senses. Dr Mosley then headed to the RNHRD, to find out more about CRPS and the Trust’s research, before experiencing the MIRAGE effect for himself.

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Press contacts:
Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS FT: Marketing and Communications 01225 465 941 ext 278 communications@rnhrd.nhs.uk
Notes to Editors

- The RNHRD NHS FT is a national specialist rehabilitation and rheumatology hospital based in Bath. Offering services to adults, children and young people, the trust has expertise in general and complex:
  - Rheumatological and musculoskeletal conditions,
  - Chronic pain rehabilitation including Complex Regional Pain Syndrome
  - Fatigue Management (CFS/ME and cancer survivorship fatigue).

- The Trust has an excellent reputation for research both nationally and internationally. Research informs our treatment programmes and contributes to a better understanding of many of the conditions in which we specialise.

CRPS
Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) is a term used to describe a collection of symptoms where pain in a limb (usually an arm or a leg) is the major problem. CRPS can be difficult to diagnose as there is no single diagnostic test and no cure currently exists. Research has shown that the average timescale between onset of symptoms and diagnosis is currently two years. Appropriate diagnosis and early intervention from a specialist multidisciplinary team is crucial to reduce the long-term effects of this complex condition which can have a significant impact on a person, affecting all areas of their life and that of their family.

- Complex Regional Pain Syndrome affects approximately 1 in every 50 people in the UK in their lifetime, most will recover but some go on to develop a long term chronic condition.
- The CRPS service at the RNHRD treats around 200 patients with this condition every year.

NIHR
The MIRAGE research project is a National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funded controlled trial. The NIHR commissions and funds NHS, social care and public health research.

www.nihr.ac.uk