Paper

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The Birmingham Continence Aid

B.R.

Hopkinson

Department of Surgery, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham

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Author's address: Dr. B. R. Hopkinson, Department of Surgery, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham (England)

This paper describes efforts to help patients suffering from pelvic floor dysfunction resulting in urinary and anal incontinence or rectal prolapse. The aim of treatment is to enable the patient to use his pelvic floor muscles to control incontinence and prolapse. The patients are taught and supervised to make sure that they can perform the voluntary pelvic floor movements of contraction and relaxation. An intra-anal plug with two electrodes on it is used to provide sensory stimulation to the anal canal and pelvic floor as well as to stimulate the muscles to contract electrically and aid continence. The plug is shaped with a 'waist' to encourage it to lie with the electrodes above and below the anal sphincter. Voluntary or electrically induced contraction of the anal sphincter will adjust the plug's position and retain the plug in place. Anal incontinence and rectal prolapse can be immediately controlled and in many cases the urethral sphincter part of the pelvic floor also contracts to maintain urinary continence. To micturate or defaecate the current is turned off and the plug removed. Patients are encouraged to do voluntary pelvic floor exercises throughout their waking day and to use the plug and stimulator for approximately 2 h daily.

This paper describes the use of the apparatus by 149 patients with rectal prolapse, anal incontinence or urinary incontinence. Approximately 50% improved their symptoms and 20% are 'cured' in the sense that they no longer use the stimulator. The time for first improvement of symptoms is usually 3–6 months.

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The treatment is simple

has few complications

can immediately control many patients as outpatients and carries a reasonable prospect of cure in the sense of the patients remaining continent without further use of the stimulator. The apparatus is available from Cardiac Recorders

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City Road

London.