

There has been much hype and interest around 'fresh cell therapy' in recent years. The aim of this information leaflet is to provide an overview of how fresh cell therapy is represented by fresh cell companies and in the popular media; why it is allowed to be practised in some European countries; and what advice scientists and researchers can give to the public.

What is fresh cell therapy?

Fresh cell therapy- also known as cell therapy, cellular therapy, live cell therapy and glandular therapy- is a procedure that involves injecting cells or cell components of animals, usually sheep, into humans. Practitioners of fresh cell therapy believe that the procedure has a healing and rejuvenating effect on the human body. Although cells taken from freshly slaughtered animals were originally used, and continue to be used today, some practitioners now use freeze-dried cells. Some have also developed cell therapy products to be taken orally.

What is the story behind fresh cell therapy?

Practitioners of fresh cell therapy emphasise that the practice has a relatively long history. Most refer to Paul Niehans, a Swiss doctor, as 'the father of cell therapy'. In 1931, Niehans successfully treated a patient who was suffering from convulsion, due to the accidental removal of her parathyroid glands, by injecting her with a solution of finely diced parathyroid glands from a freshly killed calf. Niehans went on to treat many patients, including well-known personalities such as Pope Pius XII.

What is the purported mechanism behind fresh cell therapy?

Fresh cell therapy is said to be based on the principle of 'like cures like', therefore cells from specific animals' organs are injected into patients to treat specific conditions e.g. liver cells to treat liver conditions. Practitioners of fresh cell therapy believe that cells are 'organ specific' and not species specific and therefore cells sourced from animals can be used. They also believe that fresh cell therapy improves not only the function of specific organs but also revitalises the entire body.

Controversies and bans

Critics point out the lack of scientific evidence which proves that fresh cell therapy is safe and effective [see e.g. [Goebel, Walther & Meuth 1986](#); [Last 1990](#)]. In fact, many countries ban the practice of fresh cell therapy and the importation of fresh cell therapy products intended for injections. Professional bodies, such as the [American Cancer Society](#), also advise people not to seek the treatment.

Fresh cell therapy in Europe

Fresh cell therapy is permitted in some countries, most notably in Switzerland and Germany. [In 1997, the German Ministry of Health did ban fresh cell therapy](#), citing negative side effects and unproven benefits. [However, in 2000, the Constitutional Court ruled that the 1997 ban was void](#), not

because the scientific basis behind the 1997 decision had changed, but because the ban violated professional freedom of medical practitioners. [Under Article 74 GG](#), medical practitioners are entitled to use such drugs in their own clinics, though they are not allowed to produce and circulate cell therapy products outside of their own clinics. At the moment, fresh cell therapy clinics are regulated under provincial governments in Germany. In Switzerland, fresh cell therapy is similarly considered ‘individual/individualised therapy’ and is therefore regulated under the supervisory authority of the canton (region).

Contrary to the image of fresh cell therapy as portrayed in Asia, fresh cell therapy is in fact not a widely recognised or popular practice in these European countries. [A study conducted by the World Health Organisation in 2001](#) suggests that amongst people who seek out complementary and alternative treatments, fresh cell therapy ranks low in popularity.

Public engagement

Why has fresh cell therapy become so popular, despite the fact that it has not been clinically proven to be safe and effective?

Practitioners of fresh cell therapy tend to build up their claims through the dismissal of conventional science and medicine as being dogmatic, bureaucratic and impersonal. Rather than relying on clinical data, they encourage people to take a holistic approach to healthcare and to look at ‘real life examples’. Many times, practitioners draw on patient testimonies such as:

“When I saw that my friend’s condition has improved so much, I became interested in fresh cell therapy. In my opinion, you can’t believe everything you are told, you need to see the *evidence*. In my case, if I had not *seen it with my own eyes* that my friend’s whole face had brightened up, I would not have done it myself.”

The notion of ‘evidence’ here is thus interesting. When scientists and researchers warn that there is no ‘evidence’ to support the claims made by fresh cell therapy practitioners, they mean that there is no clinical data which has been published in peer-reviewed journals to support the claims. But for clients of fresh cell therapy, ‘evidence’ does not necessarily refer to the clinical data, rather it refers to the ‘real life examples’ that they can ‘see with their own eyes’. In fact, many people have said that they favour ‘real life examples’ drawn from people they personally know and trust to the somewhat abstract research data. “How can scientists say that it does not work? How come it works for my friend?”

What does this mean for public engagement efforts around fresh cell and other therapies? If someone does not believe in conventional science and medicine, simply saying that fresh cell therapy has not been proven in clinical trials or that no results have yet been published in peer-reviewed journal would probably not convince them. In public engagement efforts, it is therefore important for scientists and researchers to explain ‘ways of doing science’ that scientists may take for granted, such as why clinical trials are important mechanisms for testing whether a therapy is safe and effective or not; what placebo effects are and how correlation does not equal causation. It is also important to empower patients, to make the patients feel that *not* going for alternative and unproven therapy is an active choice, not a passive position they are ‘stuck’ with.

For further information see:

Centre for Bionetworking
www.centreforbionetworking.org

For enquiries please contact:
Dr. Nattaka Chaisinthop
N.Chaisinthop@sussex.ac.uk

