

New treatment brings relief to lichen sclerosis sufferers

Stem-cell treatment for women with lichen sclerosis is now available in South Africa.

This long-term inflammatory disorder of the skin, which mostly affects post-menopausal women, causes intense burning and itching in the genital and anal areas and can lead to painful urination and sexual dysfunction. It can sometimes appear on other parts of the body,



Dr Katrien Dehaeck

As one of only a handful of specialists in the world to provide the stem-cell treatment, Dr Katrien Dehaeck, who practices from Vincent Pallotti Hospital in Cape Town, explains that lichen sclerosis is a very uncomfortable disease. “The skin tears easily and bright purply-red bruises are common. It also becomes scarred and causes itching, bleeding, blisters and pain in the vulvo-vaginal and anal areas. The new stem-cell treatment takes fat from the patient’s own body and injects it under the skin in the affected areas. It is minimally invasive and can be done under local anaesthetic.”

Often misdiagnosed

“Until recently, all that was available by way of treatment was the application of strong cortisone creams to treat the itch, but we use a revolutionary new stem-cell treatment that brings relief within six to eight weeks. The skin looks better, becomes more elastic and the itching disappears, which drastically improves the quality of life for these affected women,” says Dehaeck.

Dehaeck, who addressed the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists World Congress 2017 last month in Cape Town, says that women are often misdiagnosed with having thrush or a yeast infection, when it may in fact be lichen sclerosus. "I encourage women and girls to break the silence and get themselves checked out as there is no need to live for years with unnecessary pain and discomfort. South Africa is one of the leading countries in this field of research and development and patients need to know that they can be treated for lichen sclerosus once and for all," she adds.

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