INTRATHECAL INFUSION PUMP

This modality is usually offered to patients who have been tried on a variety of medical and minimally invasive treatments (e.g. epidurals) without significant success, or when patients experience many side effects with their current medical regimen. Infusion pumps have been used in patients with spastic conditions, cancer-related pain, and in selected patients with non-cancer related chronic pain. Usually patients who are candidates for this modality have been taking higher amounts of medications. However, patients who have good pain relief from their medicines but experience significant side effects (e.g. sedation) are also good candidates. The pump is a wireless and programmable reservoir that is placed in the abdomen underneath the skin. A catheter from this pump is tunneled under the skin to the back where the medicine is delivered to the fluid that bathes the spinal cord. By doing so, superior pain relief is achieved with a much lower amount of medication. Many of the side effects of medications taken by mouth are no longer an issue since a lot less medicine is required. This pump is usually re-filled every several months.

Prior to implantation of the pump, the patient may be asked to have a psychological evaluation (mandated by some insurance companies) to ensure that the patient is a good candidate for this procedure. In addition, every patient must have a trial. During the trial period, the patient will usually be admitted to the hospital and an epidural catheter will be placed in the back. Using this catheter, an infusion of medication will be given through an external pump. There is no incision for this part and the catheter will be removed at the end of the trial period, which can last between 24 to 72 hours. If there is a good response, the patient will be scheduled for the final phase, which is the implantation.

The physician will use an x-ray machine during this procedure. If you are pregnant, it is important to inform your physician.

The implantation is done some time after a successful trial. General anesthesia is most likely used for this phase. The pump will be placed under the skin in the abdominal or gluteal area and will be connected to the catheter that is placed in the back for medication delivery.

The patient will be provided with more information and some educational packets on this modality if he/she is a candidate for this procedure.