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Burlington dad hopes to halt MS progression with experimental treatment in Mexico



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photo by Michael Ivanin

Chris Graham with his kids Jordyn and Tyler. Graham is hoping an experimental stem cell transplant procedure in Mexico next year will halt the progression of his MS.

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<http://www.insidehalton.com/news-story/5744067-burlington-dad-hopes-to-halt-ms-progression-with-experimental-treatment-in-mexico/>

By [Kathy Yanchus](#)

Chris Graham misses being an active father to his young children.

"I'm finding it difficult not to do what others can do and take it for granted, said Graham, who suffers from MS and is a dad to Tyler, 13, and Jordyn, 10.

Because he can no longer drive, the 40-year-old Graham finds himself a passenger with his wife at the wheel, or hitching a ride with a friend to watch his kids play hockey.

Fatigue has zapped him of energy and he can barely make it the 50 metres to the mailbox with his walker. The former civil engineering technologist has been unable to work since 2007 and is on disability.

An MRI last November showed more lesions on his spine and brain.

Diagnosed in 2006 after waking up one morning unable to feel his right side, the disease has now robbed him of any feeling on his left side from the waist down.

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He has lost 30 pounds in eight months and is currently on a new drug to try and slow down the disease's progression. Cost of the one-a-day pills is \$40,000 annually, which fortunately, is covered by his wife Leah's employee drug plan.

"It's just been really bad. Before all this, I was playing hockey, I was playing golf all the time. I can't do any of that. Unfortunately, I've never been on the ice with them (kids), I've never skated with them," he said.

"It's tough on my kids because I'm not able to play street hockey with them. I can go to the park but it's with my walker and it's not very far away. A lot falls on my wife's shoulders. Up until last November, I was able to drive and maneuver but now it falls on her – the grocery shopping, taking the kids to appointments. It all falls on her shoulders."

So Graham has taken the next course of his treatment into his own hands. Sometime in 2016, he is scheduled to undergo a hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) in Puebla Mexico at the private Clinica Ruiz.

Graham was deemed ineligible by his neurologist for a now-closed clinical trial at Ottawa Hospital, because of the length of time he has had the illness. Another trial in Chicago was cost prohibitive, he said.

In the HSCT procedure, a patient's own stem cells are used to reboot the immune system after chemotherapy destroys it, said Graham.

His neurologist "isn't pushing" him to seek treatment in Mexico. Graham believes it's because HSCT transplants are relatively new and the long term benefits are unknown.

"They (neurologists) are having trouble accepting it as a treatment for their patients. I don't have time to wait. Once the damage is done to the nerve cells, the chances for the new immune system repairing them is a lot lower. I'm just hoping to halt the progression."

Graham has been reading blogs of fellow MS sufferers who have undergone the experimental procedure, as well as research, particularly the very positive clinical trial results of Dr. Richard Burt of Chicago's Northwestern Memorial Hospital. His latest HSCT study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association points to reversal of some MS patients' symptoms two years removed from a stem cell transplant.

MS patients who have undergone HSCT refer to it as "their new birthday," said Graham.

The procedure at Clinica Ruiz takes 6-8 weeks and will cost Graham \$60,000.

"I'm not scared. I'm not a fan of needles, but hey I'm not looking forward to not being able to walk and do what other people take for granted," he said.

The MS Society of Canada encourages individuals to maintain ongoing consultations with their healthcare team.

"The MS Society of Canada respects the autonomy of individuals when making decisions about their health," the MS Society wrote in an email to the *Post*. "By maintaining ongoing consultation with a healthcare team, people affected by MS can make informed decisions in regards to their health and management of the disease."

Up-to-date information about stem cells and related treatments can be found on the MS Society of Canada website <http://beta.mssociety.ca/research-news/stem-cells>.

To help raise funds for Graham a Halt MS fundraiser is being held on Friday, July 31 beginning at 6 p.m. at Boston Manor, 4460 Fairview St.

The event will include door prizes, a silent auction and 50/50 draw, musicians, comedians, magicians and spoken word.

Graham has also set up a Scotiabank (Upper Middle Road and Walkers Line) account for donations, 958020086886, and a GoFundMe account at www.gofundme.com/chrisgraham.

To contact Graham, email clgraham@sympatico.ca.