



I LEFT FOR UKRAINE AS A GUINEA PIG

Jacob Schatz-Jacobsen, who is a constructor, is now able to move around effortlessly in his gravel pit and sit on the excavator, waving his bare feet. He is convinced, that due to stem cell treatment he has avoided amputation. Photo: Bo Amstrup

50 year old Jacob Schatz-Jacobsen is getting better day by day after he went through stem cell treatment for his type 1 diabetes 7 months ago in Ukraine. Excruciating leg pains led him on the thrilling journey, where the doctors have assured him: “You will recover completely.”

Journalist Michael Korsbæk, Danish Diabetes Association.

Jacob Schatz-Jacobsen has been suffering from type 1 diabetes since he was four years old, and he has always taken care of himself in order to avoid any accompanying diseases. According to himself, he has been “eating like a rabbit” and has been well regulated, but in spite of this accompanying diseases started to appear. About 10 years ago his health related problems went from bad to worse, and especially his feet and legs were starting to cause many troubles for this self-employed contractor from the city of Randers in Denmark .

“My legs have been worrying me for many years, but at some point the pain became unbearable. It nearly drove me mad, and I have tried everything in order to improve the situation. Literally everything. But nothing has helped”, says Jacob Schatz-Jacobsen.

In spite of treatment with an insulin pump and a sensor, which have helped lowering and stabilizing his blood sugar levels, the insulin also started to cause him more and more problems with his eyes, his hearing ability, as well as making it difficult for him to feel acute lack of blood sugar. But the pain and the degradation of muscles in his legs have been the worst things for him.

“I have begged for help to get rid of the pain in my legs, but all the time I have been told by the doctors, that there was nothing to do about it.

An easy victim

Therefore he decided to go for it when he read about stem cell treatment on the internet. Jacob Schatz-Jacobsen chose treatment in a clinic in Ukraine’s capital Kiev, but still he was skeptical of the idea.

“I was afraid of being conned, as I was an easy victim: I was extremely ill, I was desperate and I had money. But I spent a few weeks reading about stem cells, and then I sent the money to the clinic without my wife’s knowledge. When I told her, she could not bear it at all, so I travelled on my own, even though she was against it. I was very well aware that I left as a guinea pig”, Jacob Schatz-Jacobsen admits while speaking about his big decision.

On the long journey from Randers to Kiev thoughts kept running through Jacob Schatz-Jacobsen’s head. Driving through the Eastern European city’s industrial area he was still in doubt and he was discouraged by the sight of the poorly maintained hospital. But the private clinic was situated in a separate wing, and after entering the building, everything looked different:

“It was a nice place, and I was received by 6 doctors in white coats and an English speaking interpreter.

My nervousness disappeared, as they were obviously very well informed about me and my history, and they were very good at explaining things.

They said that I would recover fully. I was told I would recover fully within a year”, he tells while his voice starts cracking.

Even now, seven months after the treatment, it is still associated with lots of emotions for the family to recall the situation in the hospital bed in the Ukrainian clinic.

Jacob Schatz-Jacobsen was lying with a drop in his left arm for three hours, and the treatment continued the day after. This time with a drop in his right arm and with some injections, that were given in the stomach region. When a few days later he thanked the doctors for the treatment and afterwards took the long trip home for Jutland in Denmark, his mind was still filled with doubt. When he got off the train in Randers, he was received by his wife on the platform.

“As soon as she saw me, she told me, she had not seen such a sparkle in my eyes for the last 20 years”.

Better day by day

In the days after his treatment in Ukraine Jacob Schatz-Jacobsen slowly started to feel the improvements. His hearing got much better and he could turn off the extra loudspeakers for the radio. His discomfort when having a low level of blood sugar disappeared, and his need of insulin has been reduced by around 20 per cent in the months since the treatment. But most important of all:

“If I had not travelled to Ukraine, my legs would have been gone by now. I am sure that my legs would have been amputated. Before the treatment my legs were nearly blue-black or purple, now they have become nearly white again and I can see, that the muscles under my feet and in my legs are slowly becoming stronger. I have thrown away my working shoe inserts, and a few days ago I could plant potatoes for a whole day, cultivate a big piece of land and only change footwear once. It is getting better day by day, and if my pain was measured ten on a scale before, it is now between three and four. I think it will be absolutely gone in a year as they said in Ukraine”.

He feels that the DKK 75,000 he paid for travel, hotel and treatment in Ukraine to a decisive extent has improved his situation.

“The effect has been invaluable. The pain is disappearing and the fear that has been gnawing for several years has disappeared completely.”