

IT takes a long time getting over a stroke but now a new machine has arrived in the UK which may be able to help recovery. SIOBHAN RYAN reports.

When Gay Harrison suffered a stroke in June 2002, she had a long road to recovery in front of her.

Although she was progressing well, she still had problems using her left arm and was determined to do something about it.

It was at this point Gay, from Crawley, heard about a new type of treatment called Intention Myofeedback Therapy (IMF).

The Therapy involves the use of a machine which helps improve the neural links between the brain and the affected part of the body and stimulates movement.

Gay was unsure how successful the machine would be but was willing to give it a go.

She said: "You are aware of a small buzz of electricity when using the machine but it is not unpleasant.

"The results for me have been tremendous. I had hardly any use of my arm but, after a few weeks, I can nearly get my hand up to my mouth.

"This is significant progress. The one thing I am determined to do is manage to use my arm and use a fork properly.

"It is no hardship to use the machine. I have a session each day for about an hour and the results have been very good.

"The physiotherapy and support you get from the NHS stops after a while but this machine helps improve results even more. I think it should be available on the NHS."

Roy Roper from near Lewes agrees the machine is useful.

After suffering a stroke in September 2002, which left him in a wheelchair, he gradually progressed to using walking sticks but still had limited use of his legs, arm and hand.

He has been using the machine for the past 6 months and has found it has worked very well.

PICTURE: JIM HOLDEN



Stroke patients get on the move

He said: "You have to be positive and help yourself as well but the machine really does make a lot of difference.

"I have been trying out the machine in various ways and it has been very helpful whenever my arm and legs are not feeling up to scratch."

The machine has been brought over from the continent by Keith Hall, a movement therapist.

He says the best thing about the machine is that it is non-invasive as well as being simple and effective.

Results so far have been very positive and people are surprised by just how much it can help.

Mr Hall first witnessed the therapy in action while on a visit to Germany, where he met Ulrich Schmidt, the man who developed the

treatment.

He was trained to use the machine and to show patients what to do.

When a person Visualise or imagines making a movement, tiny voltages are produced along nerves towards that part of the body, even when the main motor nerves are not working.

IMF involves sensing these microvoltages with conventional skin-contact electrodes, then using them to trigger larger voltages in pads attached to the appropriate muscle. This can produce the actual movement.

By following a particular regime for a given movement, this approach helps the patient develop new neural routes so they can re-establish control of their muscles.

Mr Hall said it was important for patients to be ready to concentrate hard and be

motivated but once the results started showing, people would find it easier to continue.

The machine is not suitable for everyone. It can treat nerve damage of any kind, including spinal problems, but cannot work in cases where the nerves are severed. It is also not recommended for people with pacemakers, those who are pregnant or who have thrombosis.

About 8000 people have already benefited from IMF Therapy in Spain and Germany, where more than 100 physiotherapist are using the system.

Some people respond immediately to the treatment and 80 per cent have done so within weeks rather than months.

This is incorrect and IMF Therapy does indeed work in such cases.