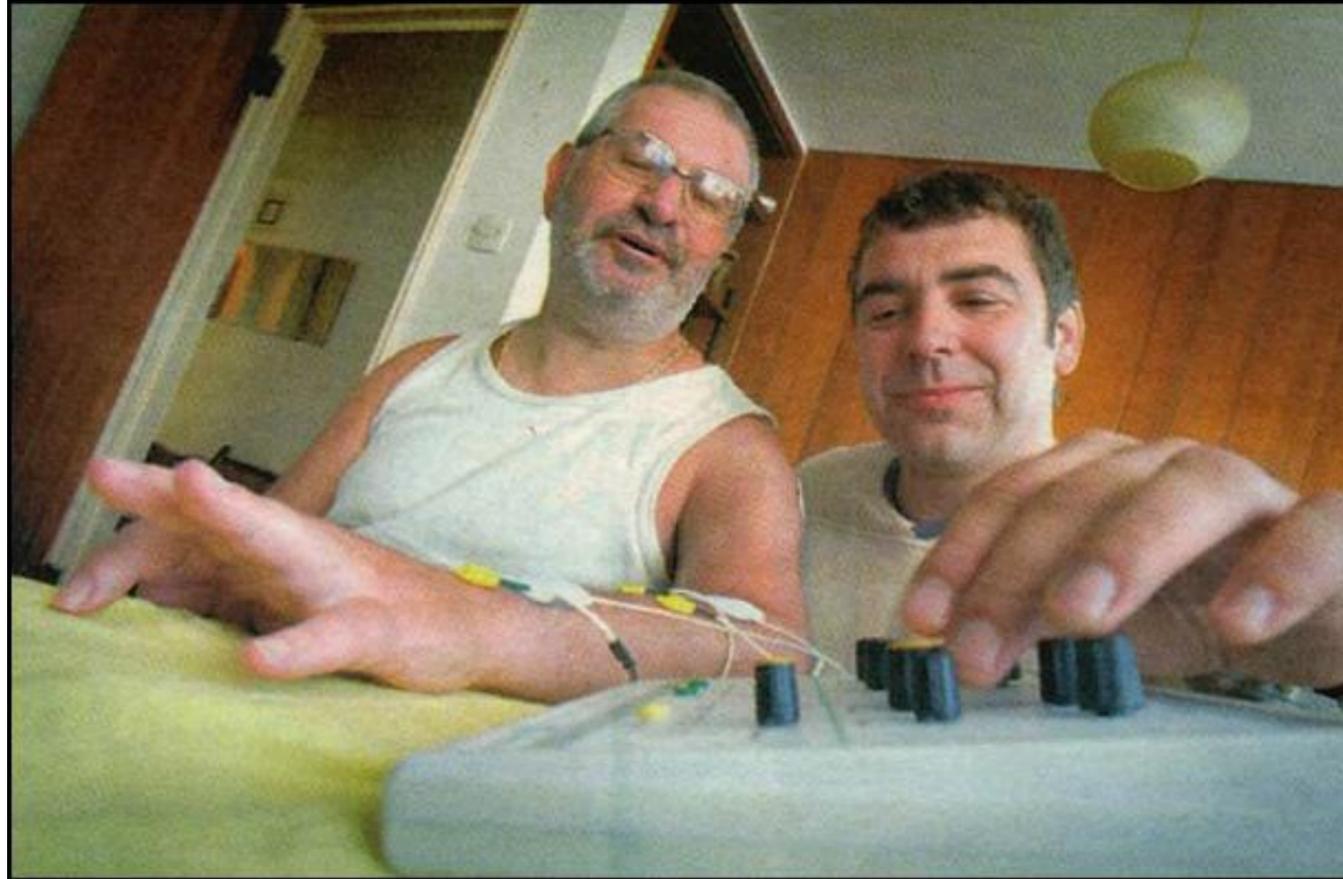


GETTING over a stroke can be a long and difficult process but now a new machine could help people on the road to recovery. SIOBHAN RYAN reports.

PICTURE: JIM HOLDEN

Keith Hall is hoping a new form of treatment will help thousands of people with strokes and multiple sclerosis. He is bringing a new type of treatment called Intention Myofeedback Therapy (IMF Therapy) over from the continent where it has been a success in the treatment of people with nerve damage. 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 regain function. Mr Hall, a movement therapist, says the non-invasive treatment is simple but effective and hopes it will help some transform some people's lives. He said; "It may not work for everyone but the results I have seen have been very impressive." Mr Hall first witnessed the therapy in action whilst living in 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 and is now hoping it will be successful in this country.

When a person visualises 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 micro-voltages with conventional skin contact electrodes, then using them to trigger larger voltages in pads attached to the appropriate muscles. This can produce the actual movement. By following a particular regime for a given movement, this approach helps the patient learn and develop new neural routes so they can re-establish control of the muscles. IMF has been found effective not only for recent stroke cases but also for people who have suffered attacks a long time before.



New Hope for Stroke Patients

Alan Glassman, from Hove, has been trying out the therapy and is amazed at the results so far.

Mr Glassman suffered a stroke on Christmas Day in 1997 which left him with a paralysed arm and unable to walk properly.

He had to learn how to talk again and cope with day-to-day tasks most people take for granted.

He has made good progress over the years but is still unable to use his arm.

He said; "My life turned upside down in 60 seconds. As well as physical problems, there were emotional and practical problems to consider. "I am now doing well and have managed to get back to playing backgammon and scrabble and I use the internet a lot".

Mr Glassman also goes swimming regularly.

"When I tried the machine, I was amazed. I have had no movement in my hand or fingers for many years. Yet, after two sessions, I could feel a sensation in my fingers and could move them a little.

"It is only at the early stages at the moment but things are looking very good. I think this machine is going to be able to help a lot of people."

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

He said; "The patient has to focus and concentrate for the therapy to work, but once the benefits arrive, it is easier to continue".

The machine is not suitable for everyone. It can treat nerve damage of any kind, including spinal problems. It also works in cases where the nerves are severed (lesions).

But is not recommended for people with pacemakers, those who are pregnant or have thrombosis.

Mr Hall said; "About 8,000 people have already benefited from IMF therapy in Germany and the Czech Republic.

"More than 500 devices (now 1,500) are in use in Germany, with more than 100 physiotherapists using the system.

"Some people respond immediately to the treatment and 80 per cent within weeks not months. I am hoping we can start to help similar numbers over here."