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Stars back use of machine to cure heroin addiction 'The cravings have disappeared, I'd love to see it used in clinics. It could change lives'

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DRUG rehabilitation experts and politicians have called for clinical trials on an abstinence treatment hailed by a succession of former celebrity drug users.

The electromedicine device, known as Net, is gathering growing support among addiction specialists, and a group of its champions has already met First Minister Jack McConnell.

Now Dr Harry Burns, Scotland's chief medical officer, is examining further research of the treatment, devised by the late Meg Patterson, a doctor who was experimenting with acupuncture in the 1970s.

Her husband, George, is continuing to lobby for its wider use.

Those calling for the medical establishment to consider Net as a viable alternative to methadone include Annabel Goldie, the Scottish Conservative leader, and Professor Neil McKeganey, of the centre for drug misuse research at Glasgow University.

Already, the non-pharmacological treatment has helped a young Scottish heroin user return to work, having stayed clean for the past 10 months.

However, Net's supporters face significant financial impediments in setting up a clinical trial, and have expressed concerns that the medical establishment is turning its back on the treatment for commercial reasons.

Net (neuroelectric therapy) consists of a small box operated with a nine-volt battery.

It works by stimulating the endorphins in the brain with a low-level electrical current.

Electrodes make contact behind the ear, and a small current is passed through a portable stimulator.

Variations of frequency, pulse width, and wavelength are used to treat different drug dependence.

It is said to detox an addict in seven days, with a reduction in withdrawal symptoms of up to 70 per cent and no side-effects.

Its claimed merits could gain greater prominence through a documentary made by Norman Stone, showing a 24-year-old from Ayrshire undergoing the treatment.

The film, *Coming Clean*, charts the progress of Barry Philips as he takes his last hit. After five days of using Net, his cravings are gone.

Ten months after *The Herald* first reported the process, Mr Philips remains drug-free.

"The cravings have disappeared," he says. "I'd love to see it being used in clinics. It could change a lot of lives. It's amazing."

Mr Stone is in talks with the BBC and Channel 4 about screening the documentary.

Miss Goldie, who met Mr Philips last month, said: "He is a walking testament to what Net can do."

"I'm calling on the Scottish Executive to move away from its one-track methadone strategy and invest funding into research of Net. Otherwise, we can't plan for the future in a coherent way."

Mr McKeganey said: "We have to be much more successful in getting people to a drug-free lifestyle. We have the equivalent of a jumbo jet full of young heroin users dying every year."

"It's extremely difficult to find effective treatment, but wouldn't you kick yourself if you had one, and just watched it sail on by?"

Mr Stone added: "This is an issue high up the political agenda, and all that is being asked is for the authorities to carry out a neutral, scientific, clinical trial of Net."

The initial non-clinical trial was paid for by Third Step, a charity set up by Peter Howson and John Mullen to fund the rehabilitation of alcohol and drug addicts. Another such trial is due to begin late next month.

Mr Mullen said yesterday: "I was the sceptic throughout. But Barry's off it and back at work. I'm totally

convinced it works. The First Minister seemed really impressed by Net. The problem is the medical establishment, the methadone lobby, and politicians' medical advisers are unwilling to listen."

A spokesman for the Scottish Executive said: "The First Minister is interested in any serious proposal that may help in the fight against drugs.

"Although he was interested to hear about Net, he recognised the treatment still needs a great deal more work and research to be done to prove that it can be effective [and] has asked the chief medical officer to consider what additional research may be required."

Success stories PETE TOWNSEND of The Who described himself as a "walking pillbox" before he discovered Net treatment. The rocker, who recently toured with the band, said it took him just three days to "get straight".

ERIC CLAPTON, who had succumbed to a heroin problem in the 1970s, used Net. Talking about the experience, the guitarist said: "I was covered in scabs, grossly overweight and evil-smelling. But I went to see Meg Patterson and it was the turning point of my life."

KEITH RICHARDS, the Rolling Stones guitarist, used Net to wean himself off heroin.

Former Culture Club frontman and celebrity DJ BOY GEORGE used the electromedicine to deal with his addictions.

Credit: Newsquest Media Group

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