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Positive about future Scott's efforts worth it to win extra years with family
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A TERMINALLY-ILL father has returned home from a trip to China after revolutionary medical treatment which he believes has given him precious extra years with his family.

Scott Nugent, from Whitley Bay, North Tyneside, flew into the North-East on Saturday after spending five weeks in the Far East undergoing ground-breaking stem cell treatment.

The 35-year-old suffers from the fatal genetic disorder Spinocerebella ataxia, and while there is no cure, Chinese doctors have had some success at relieving the symptoms.

Scott believes the treatment - which is not available anywhere else - will slow the rare neurological condition long enough for him to see his two-year-old son George grow up.

Yesterday, he was still recovering from an exhausting 32-hour journey home with his wife Louise, 37, a former primary school teacher, and son, but he told how he believes the treatment has given him a couple of extra years to spend with his family.

He said: "I'm extremely tired. The doctors said it would take about a week to get over the journey home and return to the levels I had reached, but by the time I left the hospital I was really pleased.

"I'm positive about the future. I feel like it's given me extra time - I hoped to have a couple of years, but now we think I could have three or four.

"I did all of this to spend extra time with my family and any improvement is worth the money and effort for me."

When Mr Nugent arrived in China, his co-ordination and mobility was assessed as just three out of a possible 56 on a scale used by doctors to measure his health. By the time he left he had risen to 25.

His speech and eyesight had also improved, and he could complete in 11 minutes a walk of five laps of the hospital which had previously taken him 18-and-a-half

minutes

The stem cell treatment involved the former software engineer being injected four times over four weeks with stem cells taken from the umbilical cords of healthy, full-term babies in an attempt to repair his damaged brain cells. He also underwent intensive physiotherapy.

He said: "After each of the spinal injections I had to lie still for six hours, I couldn't move at all. I wasn't allowed to eat for three hours before and six hours after, so there was nine hours without food and drink.

"It was very hard, but I could see the improvements. If I went from a score of three to 25, then it was worth it."

But for the father the toughest part of the trip was being separated from his family.

"The hardest thing was being away from my family, I had no idea how difficult that would be. I'm so pleased to be back with them and back in the North-East."

Mr Nugent was treated in HangZhou, 112 miles from Shanghai, at a cost of pounds 14,000 which was raised with the help of The Journal readers, family and friends.

He was accompanied by his friends Len Harvey and Steve Payne, and yesterday he paid them heartfelt thanks. He said: "I couldn't have managed without them. At first I didn't think I would need someone all the time, but they were a god-send.

"Without their help I don't know if I would have managed."

How the battle has unfolded:

1996: Scott Nugent begins to display the symptoms of the disease.

August 1997: Mr Nugent marries Louise and the couple decide to try for a baby.

January 2003: Oliver is born and was initially healthy, but at 12 weeks symptoms began to show and he was diagnosed at six months old.

September 22, 2003: Oliver died of the disease.

2005: The couple have their second child George.

2007: Mr Nugent decides to try to raise pounds 14,000 to undergo controversial stem cell treatment in China.

April 24, 2007: The couple appeal to The Journal readers to help them raise funds to

pay for his treatment.

May 8, 2007: An anonymous pounds 10,000 donation gave the family the funds they needed.

May 18, 2007, Mr Nugent's mother June dies of the disease. Two days later, the father dedicates a sponsored walk he had arranged to the 58-year-old.

July 10, 2007: Mr Nugent sets off for China.

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