The Jules Gonin Eye Hospital and Second Sight announce the implant of the first Argus II artificial retina in Switzerland

The Jules Gonin Eye Hospital, Department of Ophthalmology, University of Lausanne, and Second Sight Medical Products, Inc., the world leader in visual prostheses for the blind, announce that the first commercial implant of the Argus® II ("Argus II") retinal prosthesis system in Switzerland took place successfully on Thursday 30th October 2014 in Lausanne. The prosthesis was implanted by Professor Thomas J. Wolfensberger, Associate Professor, in a patient who was blind as a result of retinitis pigmentosa.

The Argus II retinal prosthesis system, or the "bionic eye" or "artificial retina" as it is sometimes known, is the culmination of twenty years of research and development conducted in order to restore sight to the blind. This is the first and only implant designed to partially restore sight in people with certain forms of retinal degeneration to have obtained marketing authorisations in Europe and in the United States. This type of implant is currently used by more than 90 patients worldwide and benefits from 7 years of clinical experience provided by the first patients to have received this revolutionary treatment.

"I am very pleased with this first implant at the Jules Gonin Eye Hospital" says Professor Thomas J. Wolfensberger. "We are delighted that medicine can now offer a concrete solution so that people who were previously blind can recover some useful vision in their daily lives, regain some independence and improve their quality of life. This treatment is indicated for blind people with very limited residual vision due to degenerative diseases such as retinitis pigmentosa who are motivated to undertake visual rehabilitation lasting several months".

Professor Wolfensberger adds that the surgery was successful and the patient is recovering well. Activation of the prosthesis began on 26th November and the Argus II system will be gradually set up for the patient. It may be used independently in a few weeks and the visual rehabilitation process will begin with the support of Second Sight's low vision specialists and the Eye Hospital's low vision rehabilitation department.

Argus II is a second-generation biomedical device developed by Second Sight for blind people suffering from degenerative diseases of the outer retina, such as retinitis pigmentosa. Captured by a miniature camera mounted in glasses, the images are sent to a small computer worn by the patient, which processes and transmits the signals to the implant via a wireless connection. These signals are sent to a set of electrodes placed on the surface of the retina which emit small electrical pulses. The latter bypass the damaged photoreceptors and stimulate the retina's remaining cells. The information is transmitted to the brain via the optic nerve creating a perception of luminous forms that the patient must then learn to reinterpret to recover some functional vision. The system was tested in a multicentric international clinical trial that began in 2007 in which sixteen European patients, including two from Switzerland, participated.

Greg Cosendai, PhD, Vice President of the European subsidiary of Second Sight, adds: "We are particularly pleased with this Swiss first at Lausanne Eye Hospital with whom we have worked for several years. After approval from the FDA (US Food and Drug Administration) in the United States and after obtaining marketing approval in Europe, this step is critical for the company and for the vision restoration field, but even more significant for those patients who now have a treatment option". Greg Cosendai specifies that the Argus II system is currently available and reimbursed in several European countries (Germany, France and Italy in particular) and that Second Sight is actively working on the establishment of several centres of excellence in Europe.

The operation was made possible through the support of private donors and the Fondation Asile des aveugles which is part of Lausanne Eye Hospital. It is hoped that this first operation in Switzerland will be the first step in support for this treatment so that all blind people for whom this product is indicated can benefit.

The system has been supported by German health insurance in 7 hospitals since 2011. This summer, the French Ministry of Health also awarded the Argus II retinal prosthesis the "Forfait innovation", a mechanism for priority medical technology with breakthrough innovation status to be supported by Social Security.

Jules Gonin Eye Hospital
The Ophthalmic Department at the University of Lausanne, the Jules Gonin Eye Hospital has renowned clinical expertise backed by cutting-edge research, making it an international centre of reference in all ophthalmic specialties. Convened within Fondation Asile des aveugles, nearly 600 employees work for the visual health of their patients every day.

Second Sight
Second Sight is a company founded near Los Angeles, California in 1998 and whose European headquarters have been located in the EPFL's Innovation Park since 2006. Second Sight is the global leader in restoring vision to the blind. Second Sight's mission is to develop, manufacture and market solutions enabling blind people to regain some functional vision and improve their quality of life. Argus II continues to be developed and improved to increase the system’s benefits. Other innovations similar to Argus II are being developed to treat other forms of blindness.

Photo and video for downloading from the site http://www.2-sight.eu

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