If you ask patients on immune globulin (IG) to name what’s most distasteful about receiving infusions, their most common answer is the side effects, often including headaches, nausea, rash and fever—none of which is any fun.

Luckily for patients, doctors and clinical researchers are studying ways to minimize the side effects of regular IG infusions, both intravenous and subcutaneous.

One medical center making strides in the quest to improve IG therapies, including the reduction of side effects, is the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Medical Center and David Geffen School of Medicine. The Medical Center currently has more than five immune globulin studies in planning or implementation phases sponsored by various IG manufacturers.

“For Southern California, we are the largest facility for clinical research and applications of immunoglobulin,” said Maria Garcia-Lloret, MD, assistant professor in pediatrics at UCLA Medical Center.

“We are a Jeffrey Modell Foundation Center of Excellence for diagnosis and treatment of immune deficiency,” Dr. Garcia-Lloret continued. “That is essentially our area of expertise.”

Robert Roberts, MD, PhD, and clinical associate professor at UCLA, explained: “Most immunoglobulin studies are not testing an experimental drug. The studies focus on lowering the side effects.”

In addition to being unfamiliar with the potential positive results of these studies, many patients are not aware of the benefits of participating in IG studies. Because IG is not an experimental new drug, patients don’t have to worry about extreme side effects or not knowing what to expect. Instead, they are able to remain on their routine IG therapy schedule and dosage, although they may be switched to an alternate product. As part of the bargain, they have a few extra forms to complete with each infusion, and they are asked to keep a diary to track side effects.

“We don’t change their dosage; we just change the product,” Dr. Roberts explained. “Because of this, most patients experience few side effects.”

While the treatment may not change much, there’s a great added benefit of participating in studies: the amount of additional medical attention a study patient receives. “Patients get a little more care by being involved in the study, because they are closely monitored,” Dr. Roberts said, and the care is free throughout the length of the study.

One patient currently involved in an IG study, 17-year-old Preston Martin, is already seeing an improvement in the side effects he used to experience. Martin receives IG treatments to treat hypogammaglobulinemia, and he is now in his second year of the study. He has received a total of 13 infusions, one every 28 days. One of the main improvements Martin appreciates is the absence of headaches after his infusions. “On the previous drug, within three days [of infusing], he would get headaches,” Denise Martin, Preston’s mom, recounted.

“They were like mini-migraines,” Preston explained.

As with all clinical studies, success is largely based on the participants’ willingness to take the time to record their symptoms and follow through during the entire course of the study. In fact, finding enough dedicated participants for a study is one of the main reasons some studies never come to completion.

According to Dr. Roberts, UCLA is always looking for new study participants, and the studies are ongoing, so patients can simply call to be added to the list of prospective participants. Most studies last six to 24 months, depending on the patients’ reactions to the product and their schedule of availability.

The benefits of a little extra paperwork—free medical care and treatment with already-approved IG products—surely make the UCLA studies worth a phone call for more information.

For More Information

If you are interested in participating in an IG clinical study at UCLA (or in learning about other studies), visit http://www.igliving.com/web_pages/resources_mrs.html or contact Dr. Robert Roberts at 310-825-6777.

For information about the Jeffrey Modell Foundation Centers for Excellence, visit http://www.info4pi.org.