



## Trypanophobia...Just a little pin prick?

With the onset of flu season and this year's H1N1 (Swine Flu) pandemic, the ultimate question seems to be "Are you getting a flu shot?" For most of us, answering this question is as simple as doing the research, weighing the options, arriving at a decision and attending an immunization clinic.

Others, however, can't even begin to think about getting a flu shot. For these people, the mere thought of a needle can lead to sweating, nausea, shortness of breath and even loss of consciousness. For these people, the possibility of getting the flu or contracting a virus is minimal compared to the frightening thought and debilitating fear of getting a needle; for these people, the dread is worse than the shot. Is it just a little pin prick? The answer for *trypanophobes* is "no way"!

According to the Wikipedia, **Trypanophobia** is an extreme and irrational fear of medical procedures involving injections or hypodermic needles. It is occasionally referred to as **aichmophobia**, **belonephobia**, or **enetophobia**, names that are technically incorrect because they simply denote a "fear of pins/needles" and do not refer to the medical aspect of trypanophobia. The name most commonly used, however, is "**Needle Phobia**".

It is estimated an average of 10 per cent of adults living in North America suffer from some form of trypanophobia. There are four types of needle phobia:

- Five per cent of the population suffers from **Vaso-Vagal trypanophobia** and fears the sight, thought or feeling of needles; these people experience a decrease in blood pressure that in turn can lead to fainting.
- It is believed **Associative trypanophobia** affects three per cent of the population and stems from a traumatic event; its symptoms are primarily psychological in nature such as extreme anxiety and panic attacks.
- The two per cent of the population with **Resistive trypanophobia** experiences a violent resistance to needles. High blood pressure, avoidance and

combativeness are some of the extreme symptoms associated with this phobia.

- The fourth type of trypanophobia, representing one per cent of the population, is **Hyperalgesic** and is described as an inherited hypersensitivity to pain, or hyperalgesia. For them, the immediate point of needle penetration is unbearably painful, even though it may last only seconds.

It is believed most needle phobes either experienced a painful or traumatic injection that, subconsciously, has led them to fear all needles. Others may have acquired the phobia because someone else (often a family member) experienced a traumatic injection or medical procedure since about 80 per cent of trypanophobes have a family member with needle phobia. Children often mimic the fears of the adult and may develop their parents' fears.

Cases of death due to needle phobia are rare; the concern, however, is that some deaths may be caused by the avoidance of medical care due to needle phobia. For example, blood tests can be key to diagnosing disease and prescribing proper treatments, yet some needle phobes may put their life and health at risk by avoiding even these common procedures.

If you think you may suffer from needle phobia, a number of treatments are available to help you deal with the condition. Doctors can provide therapy, hypnosis and medication tailored for each individual. Whether assistance is provided by anesthesia, anti-anxiety agents, behavioural therapy, laughing gas or simple relaxation techniques, needle phobics must focus on de-programming their fear and becoming desensitized to the triggers of the phobic response. This is especially important not only for your own health and well-being, but also to ensure you don't pass on your phobia to the next generation.

Just a little pin prick? No, for some, trypanophobia can be a matter of life and death.