

## Qualify the Doctor

Neurologists and neurosurgeons treat patients with many conditions. Given that trigeminal neuralgia and most other neuropathic facial pain conditions are rare, it is important to check to make sure that the doctor has experience treating your condition. Therefore, some of the questions you might want to ask the physician you are considering can be found below.

### **Key Questions for a Neurologist**

- How many years have you been treating people with trigeminal neuralgia (TN)?
- How many TN patients have you had in the past 5 years, and how many do you currently have?
- What do you typically do if your first line of treatment doesn't work?
- In addition to prescribing medications, are you open to your patients considering surgical procedures and complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) (e.g., acupuncture, medical cannabis, meditation and mindfulness, upper cervical chiropractic care, and others)?
- Have you referred TN patients to neurosurgeons or CAM providers, and if so, what percentage of your TN patients have been referred to other healthcare providers?

### **Key Questions for a Neurosurgeon**

- How many years have you been treating people with trigeminal neuralgia (TN)?
- How many procedures do you perform in a year, and when was the last one?
- What percentage of your surgeries are microvascular decompression procedures (MVDs) as opposed to other neurosurgeries?
- What is your personal MVD success rate? What percentage are pain free at one year, two years, five years? (An inability to answer those questions may indicate a lack of follow-up. A less than stellar percentage indicates either poor technique or poor patient selection.)
- How do you define a successful MVD?
  - In most patients, a successful MVD is defined as complete pain-relief without the need for medications. In a minority of patients, the definition may not be as stringent for a variety of reasons.
- What is your personal complication rate?
- Do you treat both the medical and surgical aspects of TN? If not, is there someone you refer to?
- What do you do if you don't find any vascular compressions during surgery?

- If the surgery is not successful, what is your alternative treatment plan?
- What are the risks of the surgery?
- What procedure(s) do you do for TN other than MVD, and if you don't do one, is there someone in your group who does?

**Keep in mind...**

- If the doctor does not answer these questions to your satisfaction, then you might want to consider a different physician.
- The neurologist and neurosurgeon should take a good history of your symptoms and ask enough questions to be able to come up with a differential diagnosis (e.g., possible causes), especially because some procedures, such as MVD, are only appropriate with a certain type of TN.
- The neurologist or neurosurgeon should have TN or MVD listed as a focus or subspecialty under their name. When searching, include those words to make sure that you find those with substantial experience, even within a multidisciplinary program.