

Local doctor offering new way of treating depression

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Technology has advanced everything from phones to cars. Now new technology is making strides in mental health issues.

According to Dr. Jay Narola MD, patients suffering from depression can be treated with a non-drug treatment called transcranial magnetic stimulation, similar to an MRI. He has been using the treatment for about two months on four different patients.

By using highly focused magnetic pulses, the brain is stimulated to control mood. Narola said his patients with depression cannot lead a normal life. Many times medication does not help and side effects are always an issue.

"People stop taking medications because of side effects," Narola said.

According to NeuroNectics, the company that produces the NeuroStar TMS, 41 percent of people diagnosed with depression discontinue medication due to side effects. Depression affects more than 14 million people adults each year.

Depression results in a persistent state of sadness or loss of interest or pleasure. According to information from NeuroStar, depression causes an economic burden of more than \$80 billion each year. More than half of all suicides are attributed to depression.

Depression can cause problems in relationships, physical health, hobbies and employment. According to information from NeuroStar, depression can cause a person to miss family events, work and cause physical health problems.

Symptoms include; significant weight or weight gain, increase or decrease in appetite, excessive sleepiness or insomnia, agitation and restlessness, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or excessive and inappropriate guilt nearly every day, diminished ability to think or make decisions, recurrent thoughts

of death or suicide.

These symptoms are often treated with antidepressants, which are believed to work by treating the levels of neurotransmitters in the brain, according to Narola.

"Antidepressants do not work for everybody," Narola said.

If one medicine doesn't work, according to Narola, then others are tried and side effects can become a problem. He said weight gain, sexual problems, upset stomach, sleepiness and dry mouth are a few of the side effects.

Narola's patient, Grover Lowe, 57, said his depression started when he was injured at work in 1998. He was greaser on a strip mining job when he fell. He was sent to several specialists and had two major surgeries, but the pain got worse.

"I live with pain chronic pain," Lowe said. "It's hard to live with chronic pain. It does a job on your mental health."

The pain caused depression, which was made worse when his mother died.

"I was depressed all the time," Lowe said. "I had a lot of death in the family."

Lowe was the primary caregiver for his mother, who had a stroke. According to Lowe, his mother was on the floor for six hours because he could not get to her. He also lost his father and brother in a short space of time.

The depression worsened and so did the pain, Lowe said. He had been seeing Narola, who suggested TMS.

"I was kind of wary of the new treatment," Lowe said. "But I can tell a difference in my whole outlook."

Patients are prescribed TMS treatment by a psychiatrist. Narola uses a patient health questionnaire, PHQ-9 to assess the patient. Patients answer questions, such as "Little interest in doing things." Answers are 0-3, with 0 being not at all and 3 being nearly everyday. Before Lowe began treatments his score was 15, after treat-



Grover Lowe, a patient of Dr. Jay Narola MD, receives transcranial magnetic stimulation, which is similar to an MRI, to relieve severe depression. News-Express photo by Danetta Barker

ments for six weeks, his dropped to seven then three.

Treatments are given five days a week for four to six weeks. Each treatment lasts about 37 minutes. Lowe has finished his first six-week treatment.

Each day, Lowe came to Narola's office where a certified operator administered the treatment. Annette Fleming, one of three operators, will get Lowe settled and hooked up to the machine.

"We start by finding the pre-frontal cortex," Narola said.

Two dots on the coil are sensors that are reflected on the monitor. When the coil is in the right position, the treatment can begin. The patients is made comfortable and Narola and the operator monitor the treatment. Lowe likes the lights low, the news on the television and a soft drink.

Several little tapping noises, which sound like a woodpecker, are made dur-

ing the four second treatment. Narola said then there is four seconds on and 26 seconds off. If the patients moves during this time, the treatment can be interrupted.

"But, we will make up for any seconds missed at the end of the treatment," Narola said. "The monitor tells us if anything is missed."

Lowe reclined in the chair, much like a dental chair, and closed his eyes.

"They have to keep me awake," he laughed.

The first treatment was more difficult as the stimulator was moved to the correct place. Lowe said his fingers twitched then, but now he has no twitches. He also said that his other doctors have noticed his mood changes.

"I have three great doctors, Dr. Steven Harridan, Dr. Leon Briggs and Dr. Narola," Lowe said. "My other doctors tell me that they can see a difference in me. In the real world you

don't see yourself as others do."

Fleming said she and other office staff could also see the difference in Lowe's mood. She said does seem to be happier.

Narola said some health insurance doesn't want to pay for the treatments. However, he said the results help patients with other physical health

issues and bring down medical costs.

"Truly speaking, if it is FDA approved how can you say that it is experimental," Narola said.

For Narola though, the biggest payment is to see a patient feel better.

"I have three patients in remission," Narola said. "This is raising the bar on the standard of care."

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