

Health Bulletin

Innovative Brain Pacemaker Offers New Hope For Parkinson's Patients

(NAPSA)—Collaboration between medical technology companies and pioneering physicians is resulting in new treatments with unprecedented results.

Currently, more than one million Americans suffer from the devastating effects of Parkinson's disease, a journey in which the patient gradually loses control over body movements. Sometimes the degeneration takes many years, sometimes just a few.

Caused by the loss of cells responsible for creating dopamine in a region of the brain called the substantia nigra, Parkinson's is characterized by stiffness of the limbs and joints, slowness of movement, and involuntary shaking. Eventually, everyday tasks may become so difficult that venturing outside the home is nearly impossible.

Introduced in the late 1960s, levodopa has been the standard drug therapy for Parkinson's disease. While the drug can significantly improve mobility, its effectiveness can decrease over time until side effects sometimes become worse than the disease itself.

New Therapies

One new approach is the Activa System from Medtronic. Often referred to as a "brain pacemaker," the Activa System includes two surgically implanted medical devices to deliver electrical stimulation to areas on each side of the brain. The stimuli



"The surgery has been extremely important to me," Sherry says.

blocks signals that cause disabling motor symptoms.

The FDA approved Activa Parkinson's Control Therapy earlier this year. It is intended as a complementary treatment for patients in the advanced stages of the disease who still respond to the drug levodopa but whose symptoms are not adequately controlled by medication.

One Woman's Experience

Sherry Swinford was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 1994, at the age of 52. She began to have trouble walking and the inability to do the little things wore her down. "You can't drink a glass of water," she explains. "You seem to lose your dignity. I temporarily stopped all my crafts, my canning and my gardening."

Sherry and her husband, Mack, had been an active couple, but over time, they gave up

many social opportunities. "I couldn't cut my own steak in a restaurant. My right leg would shake. I'd shuffle, and people would look at me as though I'd been drinking. The comments were terrible. I didn't want to be seen in public."

When Sherry first began medication to treat her Parkinson's symptoms, she "threw up constantly. And constipation was a real problem." Swinford also suffered from dyskinesias, uncontrollable movements that can occur after prolonged use of antiparkinsonian medication.

Sherry's family was concerned when she decided to try a therapy that would require brain surgery, but she was determined that it was the right choice.

Although Sherry still has occasional stiffness and continues to take her Parkinson's medications, she says that with Activa Therapy, her ability to function is "a complete turnaround."

They are quick to say that the decision to try Activa Therapy was not easy. "But for us," says Mack, "it's made a 100-percent difference in our lives."

Results of Activa Therapy vary from patient to patient. Not every response is the same and Activa is not for everyone.

For more information on the Activa Parkinson's Control System, talk with a neurologist or call Medtronic at 1-800-664-5111 extension 1070.