

PMS seldom understood, often misdiagnosed

By CINDY DUNLEVY
Staff Writer

It may sound like a chapter from *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but the symptoms are real and the suffering is intense.

Lindsay Leckie suffered from cyclical patterned anger, depression and migraine headaches for nearly eight years before she found relief.

"I thought I was going crazy," Leckie said. "I'd have to refuse invitations to go out and I would lock myself in my room."

Leckie had incapacitating symptoms three weeks out of each month, with no idea what caused them. But finally, through an article her mother found, Leckie discovered her problem and began the treatment that would render her life almost normal.

The article concerned PMS, or premenstrual syndrome, a hormone disorder originating in the brain. A woman with PMS can suffer from as many as 150 symptoms, including headaches, sinus problems, crying, paranoia, compulsive eating, clumsiness, depression, anger and violence.

The key to determining PMS is timing, watching for a cyclical relationship between the symptoms occurring each month and the menstrual cycle.

Leckie's brother, a doctor at Duke University Medical Center, took the article

and began looking for more information. He found a clinic in Boston that was treating PMS, and Leckie's family sent her there.

Within one year she overcame her usual three-week battles with depression and wishes to die and became chairman of the National PMS Society. The society is based in Durham. Patty Cannon, the society's vice chairman, runs another office in Utah.

In 1982, Leckie was interviewed on *20/20* and Cannon had a PMS article featured in *Family Circle* magazine. The responses from the interview and article pointed to a backlog of women sufferers, Leckie said.

The lack of PMS research is because of failure to connect all of a woman's symptoms to her menstrual cycle, a PMS society brochure said. She goes to a neurologist for her migraines, a gynecologist for water retention and a psychiatrist for depression. The symptoms are never combined nor seen in their cyclical pattern by one doctor.

"The real effects of PMS are seen in their interference with the women's daily lives and their potential as human beings," Leckie said. About 22 million women suffer from PMS, and 6.5 million suffer to the incapacitating extent, Leckie said.

Drug and alcohol abuse can be spin-off effects of PMS, Leckie said. "Women with PMS are more susceptible to alcohol.

She (a woman with PMS) can drink her date under the table on the 15th, and on the 7th she's dancing on the table."

Drug abuse results from women taking painkillers two weeks out of each month. "Pretty soon it is just hard to stop."

Leckie added that more than 50 percent of female suicides occur within the four days before menstruation.

For female students who suffer from PMS, Leckie said studies show that test scores increase and decrease during different times in the menstrual cycle.

"For these women scores can drop 40 percent. One girl was excused for two weeks of each month from the school. 'Lucky her,' others would say. Yes, lucky her. She was sick in bed and had to do a month's work in two weeks."

Leckie stresses that PMS is a major women's health issue. "It isn't fair for a doctor to say, 'Honey, I can't find anything wrong with you, take a Valium.'"

Women need each other and this is the base purpose for the PMS Society: to lend support and information to PMS sufferers, Leckie said.

There is no cure for PMS yet. Doctors usually prescribe natural progesterone treatment and elimination of some salt, sugar and caffeine from the diet.

Dr. Mary Jane Gray, of the University's Gynecological Clinic, said treatment for each woman differs because of the variety of symptoms. "PMS is a very individual sort of problem," Gray said.

Gray added that PMS has been around for years and years. She recommended charting symptoms, if they are severe, to find if there is a cyclical pattern.

Usually a complete physical and psychiatric examination are required to make sure nothing else is wrong. "The first photographer for a story about us," Leckie said, "heard the interview and felt she had the symptoms of PMS. So she went to her doctor and found she had a tumor." Leckie said this is why it is necessary to get an entire exam.

Starting the birth control pill or stopping it, first menstruation, childbirth and hysterectomies are shocks to the endocrine system and seem to trigger the onset of PMS. Leckie said her PMS resulted from taking the birth control pill.

"Some doctors have been known to treat PMS by performing a hysterectomy," Leckie said. "This can just make everything worse."

Leckie still has headaches, but says she feels 85 percent better. And she no longer thinks about suicide.

"I can see a big difference," Leckie added. "So can my family."



Lindsay Leckie

Coincidences

awe all involved
in child delivery

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — When the labor pains start two weeks early and the only route to the hospital is a jam-packed freeway, what do you do?

In a pinch, you could head for the hospital, pull off the highway and wait for a Chinese-speaking obstetrician to happen along.

The Manhattan-bound traffic was crawling along the Long Island Expressway on Thursday morning when 25-year-old Wyai Heung Chan began feeling labor pains. She and her husband, 31-year-old Hoi Wah Chan, entrusted their 2-year-old daughter to a neighbor and set out from their home in the Long Island City section of Queens.

But long before they made it to Beth Israel Hospital in Manhattan, they realized they had to pull over and began preparing to deliver the baby themselves.

Then began the coincidences:

- The motorists who stopped to help included an obstetrician, Dr. Kwok Y. Miu.

- He turned out to be the partner of their regular doctor.

- With him was his wife, Natalie, a registered nurse.

- And he and his wife were able to speak Chinese to Mrs. Chan, who had little command of English.

Baby Derek Chan emerged, weighing 6 pounds, 6 ounces. Mother and child were doing fine at the hospital a few hours later, said Beth Israel spokeswoman Saralee Faizelson.

"The doctors are in awe at the coincidences," said another spokeswoman, Grace Kraskin.



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