

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Healthbeat

Medical Center to test new epilepsy treatment

Epilepsy specialists at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center are testing an investigational device designed to control seizures in patients with epilepsy. The device is a responsive neurostimulator (RNS™ System) which is implanted in the brain, detects abnormal electrical activity in the brain and sends out electrical impulses to prevent seizures. Wake Forest Baptist is the only center in North Carolina, Tennessee and South Carolina to test the device made by NeuroPace.

"This technology offers new hope to patients who have not responded to other treatments currently available and continue to have seizures," said William Bell, M.D., an epileptologist and principal investigator for the study at the medical center.

Unlike the vagal nerve stimulator, another implantable device to treat seizures, the RNS treats the exact area of the brain affected by seizures. These are often areas of the brain that cannot be safely removed by epilepsy surgery. Patients are unaware of the electrical impulses used to control their seizures.

To enroll in the study, patients must be between the ages of 18 and 70 and have had an average of three seizures per month for the last three months, despite being treated with medication for partial epilepsy.

Over 240 people will be enrolled in the study at 28 medical centers nationwide for a two- to three-year period. Patients will be asked to keep a diary of their seizure activity and use a laptop and data transmitter to send information from their device to neurologists at Wake Forest Baptist to analyze.

Giger to speak at A&T symposium

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University School of Nursing Center on Health Disparities Research Winter Symposium will be held Friday, Jan. 5, in Noble Hall from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., located on the corner of Bluford and Dudley streets.

The featured speaker and symposium facilitator will be Joyce Newman Giger, Ph.D., R.N., F.A.A.N., Professor and Lulu Wolf Hassenplug Endowed Chair, the University of California at Los Angeles School of Nursing. Giger's specialization is: Transcultural health care, eliminating health disparities and vulnerable populations. She will discuss her latest work addressing genetic predictors of coronary heart disease risk factors in premenopausal African-American women and fat distribution and cardiovascular disease risk factors in African-American women. She will also share her work addressing: problem solving abilities, social support and adjustment among family caregivers of individuals with a stroke and, the challenges of cross-cultural communication. There is no admission fee. Lunch is on your own.

Girls study finds that more weighing equals more trouble

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) - Teen girls who frequently weighed themselves were more likely than others to resort to unhealthy dieting measures, and some ended up gaining close to twice as much weight, a study of Minnesota students found.

The most scale-obsessed girls in the University of Minnesota research were more likely to skip meals, use diet pills or laxatives, smoke, and binge and vomit to lose weight.

"The act of getting on the scale, weighing yourself every day, can lead to an unhealthy weight preoccupation," said lead researcher Dianne Neumark-Sztaine, a professor at the university's School of Public Health. "And teenage girls who are concerned about their weight are at great risk for unhealthy weight control behaviors."

The study - published in this month's issue of the Journal of Adolescent Health - surveyed 2,516 Minnesota junior high and high school girls and boys in the 1998-1999 school year and followed up in 2003-2004.

Close to 10 percent of the girls said at the beginning of the study that they strongly agreed with the statement, "I weigh myself often."

When questioned in the follow-up, 92 percent of those girls said they engaged in some kind of unhealthy weight-control behavior, compared to about 68 percent of girls who strongly disagreed that they weighed themselves frequently.

Unhealthy weight-control behavior could be as minor as skipping an occasional meal. Thirty-eight percent of girls who frequently weighed themselves reported engaging in extreme weight-loss behavior; a higher percentage than for girls who did not weigh themselves often but not enough to be considered statistically significant.

Chewable contraceptive made

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) - Looking for a contraceptive that's convenient - and tasty? The first chewable birth-control method, a tiny, spearmint-flavored tablet that also can be swallowed without chewing, has hit pharmacy shelves.

Femcon Fe, which contains the same hormones as standard oral contraceptives, offers a new option for women who don't like swallowing pills and want to take their birth control with them, according to Carl Reichel, president of drugmaker Warner Chilcott of Rockaway.

Warner Chilcott, which makes prescription dermatology and women's health products, officially launched the product Thursday aimed at women who sometimes forget to take their pills.

"This isn't a great leap forward, but I think this is a helpful step," said Dr. Lee Shulman, chairman of the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals, and an obstetrician-gynecologist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and a professor at Northwestern University.

"I think it is a better approach in the group of women who have a very high rate of unintended pregnancy, which is younger women," Shulman said.



Neumark-Sztaine

Funds help HBCUs to raise HIV awareness

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

On World AIDS Day, Dec. 1, the Tom Joyner Foundation, founded by the nationally syndicated radio personality and philanthropist, announced that it has distributed \$25,000 each to eight historically black colleges and universities to promote awareness on HIV/AIDS.

The foundation received the grant from McFarland and Associates and the Program Coordinating Center (PCC) for the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's (SAMHSA/CSAP) Minority Education Institution (MEI) Initiative. The institution will be responsible for conducting the HIV projects.



Tom Joyner

The following campuses participated this year: Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, Texas; Southern University of Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge, La.; Howard University, Washington, D.C.; Virginia Union University, Richmond, Va.; Bowie State University, Bowie, Md.; Savannah State University, Savannah, Ga.; Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena, Miss.; University of the Virgin Islands.

"We've got to do all we can to make sure our young people know everything about protecting themselves and preventing further spread of HIV/AIDS," said Joyner, who created the foundation and whose four-hour drive-time show is heard in 115-plus markets and heard by more

than eight million listeners. "This partnership shows how important it is that our students at HBCUs are educated not just with book knowledge, but about all aspects of life."

Dr. Belinda Anderson, president of Virginia Union, said the money will be a huge help. "We've already started and we're very appreciative to have the opportunity to educate our population and hopefully they'll spread the word to others to prevent this disease."

The Tom Joyner Foundation is responsible for raising more than \$55 million dollars and helping some 40 colleges and thousands of deserving students. Each month, Joyner raises

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Study focuses on young breast cancer survivors

Participants are needed

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

CHAPEL HILL - Helping younger breast cancer survivors cope with uncertainty is the focus of a new study by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Nursing.

Women less than 50-years-old not only fear their cancer returning, they are also confronted with challenges unlike those that many cancer survivors over 50 have to face, said Dr. Merle Mishel, Kenan professor of nursing and the study's lead investigator. Those challenges include infertility as a result of treatment, raising children and isolation among their peers.

Mishel and her colleagues will adapt an intervention found to be successful in managing uncertainty among older women with breast cancer who are long-term survivors. It will teach women behavioral and communication strategies designed to calm fears of recurrence triggered by life events. They will also have a guide that includes the most up-to-date methods for managing treatment side effects such as hot flashes, body image issues, lymphedema and fatigue.

The \$2.2 million study is funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research, part of the National Institutes of Health.

The Carolina researchers also plan to test the intervention's effect on women's cortisol levels. Following exposure to stressful or life threatening situations, cortisol, a naturally occurring stress hormone, sometimes remains at elevated levels, unable to fluctuate or return to normal levels. Researchers hope the strategies and skills taught in the intervention will help participants have a more regulated cortisol response to cancer related stressors.

"We want to help these women manage their uncertainty by giving them the skills to cope with their fears and concerns and information to manage treatment side effects," Mishel said. "We want them to help them experience less distress and more positive life experiences by being open to change and new opportunities."

Mishel and her research team are recruiting study participants in cities across North Carolina and are looking for women less than 50-years-old who are two- through four-year breast cancer survivors. Women interested in participating may call (800) 349-5858 for more information.



NBA star fights AIDS back home

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Emeka Okafor, 2005 NBA Rookie of the Year and Charlotte Bobcat star, announced recently in Washington, D.C., the launch of his new One Million African Lives Initiative ("Million Lives Initiative") in partnership with the Safe Blood for Africa Foundation (SBFA). The goal of the initiative is to save a million lives in sub-Saharan Africa over the next five years by reducing the number of HIV-infected blood transfusions given to patients and increasing number of voluntary non-remunerated blood donors.

Okafor chose to partner with the Safe Blood for Africa Foundation, a leading international non-profit organization working with 34 sub-Saharan African countries, to help make a sustainable solution to reduce the number of transmission infections of HIV and other blood-borne diseases in Africa.

"In my home country of Nigeria and across the African continent, innocent men, women and children are likely given a death sentence when infected with HIV and other blood-borne diseases through tainted blood transfusions," said Okafor. "Sadly, as pregnant women and children receive the most blood transfusions they are the groups who most often receive the disease this way. Simply testing the blood from one person before it is given to another can help stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and save hundreds and thousands of African lives each year."

In sub-Saharan Africa, 24.5 million individuals live with HIV/AIDS, accounting for 71 percent of the estimated worldwide infections. Transfusion caused infections account for approximately 10 percent of AIDS cases throughout Africa according to the World Health

Organization, with the majority of these cases being pregnant women and children suffering from anemia and malaria.

HIV test kits are a cost-effective preventative measure against the spread of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. Over the course of the next five years, the Million Lives Initiative hopes to support the distribution of 10 million test kits to properly trained clinicians in Africa.

"Today, I ask my colleagues at the NBA, and celebrities and citizens around the globe, to join me in this mission," Okafor said. "By coming together as people of all colors and nations, we have the ability to save lives by simply making a donation to support this effort. In the United States, it is a crime to knowingly spread HIV/AIDS infection, yet in Africa we are spreading HIV/AIDS to innocent victims through tainted blood transfusions every day. We need to stop this crime against humanity and save these innocent victims from a potential death sentence. Visit our website, www.onemillionafricanlives.org, and find out how you can be a part of the one of the world's best AIDS prevention initiatives."

The One Million African Lives Initiative, working with SBFA, will support delivery of test kits, Technical training, clinical education and donor recruitment programs. Safe Blood for Africa has been supported by many organizations including the World Health Organization, the World Bank, Johns Hopkins, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, ExxonMobil, USAID, and the CDC.

In 2007, Okafor and other NBA players will embark on a "Million Lives Tour" campaign through Nigeria, the Congo, and Angola, countries hard hit by the HIV/AIDS



Emeka Okafor

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Diabetic Neuropathies



African Americans are more likely to develop diabetes than their Caucasian peers, and with diabetes comes the risk of diabetic neuropathy. Diabetic neuropathies are a family of nerve disorders caused by diabetes. People with diabetes can, over time, have damage to nerves throughout the body. An estimated 50 percent of those with diabetes have some form of neuropathy, but not all with neuropathy have symptoms. The highest rates of neuropathy are among people who have had the disease for at least 25 years.

Diabetic neuropathy also appears to be more common in people who have had problems controlling their blood glucose levels, in those with high levels of blood fat and blood pressure, in overweight people, and in people over the age of 40.

Causes

Nerve damage is likely due to a combination of factors including high blood glucose, long duration of diabetes, possibly low levels of insulin, and abnormal blood fat levels. Vascular factors (damage to the blood vessels that carry oxygen and nutrients to the nerves) and mechanical injury to the nerves (such as carpal tunnel syndrome) can also play a role. Genes and smoking or alcohol use may also play a role. The best way to prevent neuropathy is to keep your blood glucose levels as close to the normal range as possible.

Symptoms

Symptoms depend on the type of neuropathy and which nerves are affected. Some people have no symptoms at all. For others, numbness, tingling, or pain in the feet is often the first sign. A person can experience both pain and numbness. Often, symptoms are minor at first, and since most nerve damage occurs over several years, mild cases may go unnoticed for a long time. Symptoms may involve the sensory or motor nervous system, as well as the involuntary (autonomic) nervous system. In some people the onset of pain may be sudden and severe.

Symptoms may include numbness, tingling, or pain in the toes, feet, legs, hands, arms, and fingers; wasting of the muscles of the feet or hands; indigestion, nausea, or vomiting; diarrhea or constipation; dizziness or faintness due to a drop in postural blood pressure; problems with urination; erectile dysfunction (impotence) or vaginal dryness; and weakness.

Diagnosis

Neuropathy is diagnosed on the basis of symptoms and a physical exam. During the exam, the doctor may check blood pressure and heart rate, muscle strength, reflexes, and sensitivity to position, vibration, temperature, or a light touch. The doctor may also do other tests to help determine the type and extent of nerve damage. A comprehensive foot exam assesses skin, circulation, and sensation. The test can be done during a routine office visit. Nerve conduction studies check the transmission of electrical current through a nerve. Your doctor may also do other radiological or chemical studies.

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