

NMCP Offers New Pain Management Treatment

Naval Medical Center - Portsmouth

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Naval Medical Center Portsmouth's (NMCP) Interdisciplinary Pain Medicine Clinic recently started using a new pain management treatment option, Alpha-Stim. While this technology has been around for years, NMCP started using this treatment only a few months ago for active duty patients.



Alpha-Stim is a clinically proven medical device that relieves anxiety, insomnia and depression using electromedical technology.

“Alpha-Stim is a small unit that sends a small electrical current into the brain and changes the signal in your brain to go more into an alpha state,” said Darren Love, a pain psychologist for NMCP’s Interdisciplinary Pain Medicine Clinic. “Alpha state is where you are more relaxed and feel better, you are more alert, especially when you are in pain or stressed out.”

Alpha-Stim comes in two models, Alpha-Stim M and Alpha-Stim AID. NMCP is using the Alpha-Stim AID model.

“We are using it to treat for depression, anxiety and insomnia for our patients since most of our patients have some form of one, or even all three, of them when it comes to chronic pain,” Love said.

The device has easy-to-use clips that attach to the earlobes for 20 minutes. It begins at the electron level, allowing the body’s cells to return to their natural functioning state. This is a six-week treatment program.

“The way Alpha-Stim works is that it is an accumulative effect so the more you use it, the more you’re going to maintain that kind of state, and it helps improve emotions as well as sleep better,” Love said.

The advantage of Alpha-Stim is it reduces the use of medications.

Medications can have a variety of side effects and can be addictive.

According to research studies, Alpha-Stim is well-tolerated and safe, having no significant side effects.

“There’s people who wouldn’t be able to do their jobs anymore if they are on an antidepressant, period,” Love said. “There are a lot of jobs, unfortunately, that if a patient is on any form of medications, antidepressants and whatnot, then they are completely out. If we can use Alpha-Stim to help regulate their mood then we don’t have to put them on antidepressants and we won’t lose them in those positions and we can maintain them.”

Love added that not all patients receive Alpha-Stim treatment. Because it is a new treatment option at NMCP, the clinic only has so many devices. He says that it’s not because every patient needs it, but because the clinic is currently using it on patients who need it more, based on their medical status.

As of now, Love is the only pain psychologist at NMCP to provide Alpha-Stim treatment, and recently finished with the first group of patients to use it.

“During that time period, each time the patients came in they would fill out paperwork for their depression, anxiety and insomnia as well as their pain,” Love said. “We were measuring that along the way to make sure it was actually being effective for them.”

For those who had finished with a positive treatment outcome, the clinic was able to order each of those patients an Alpha-Stim device to use at home.

“Our goal overall is to help our patients learn how to manage their pain so they can live the life they want,” Love said. “If we can improve their mood and improve their sleeping, we are more likely to improve their overall pain and their perception of pain. They can do the things they want to do which will allow them to stay on active duty.”

As the U. S. Navy's oldest, continuously-operating hospital since 1830, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth proudly serves past and present military members and their families. The nationally acclaimed, state of the art medical center, including its ten branch and TRICARE Prime clinics, serves the Hampton Roads area; in addition to premier research and teaching programs designed to prepare new doctors, nurses and hospital corpsmen for future roles in healing and wellness.