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## Invention Helps Ease Gulf War Aftermath : Technology: Kuwait buys 300 bio-electric devices from a Hawthorne neurobiologist, who says the instrument provides faster and more effective treatment of stress-related ailments.

January 28, 1993 | ANTHONY MILLICAN | TIMES STAFF WRITER

The pocket-size, bio-electric therapy invention of a Hawthorne neurobiologist is being used to help thousands of Kuwaitis handle the stress-related effects of the Gulf War and its aftermath.

The instrument, called an Alpha-Stim, produces an electrical "brain boost" that--according to inventor Daniel Kirsch--provides faster and more effective treatment of stress-related ailments, including headaches, neck and shoulder tension and insomnia.

Armed with research studies to back up his claims, Kirsch has persuaded the Kuwaiti government to purchase 300 of the devices from his Hawthorne-based company, Electromedical Products International Inc.

Last October, the Kuwait Ministry of Health sponsored a one-month visit by Kirsch so he could help develop a nationwide stress syndrome treatment program in the Middle Eastern country.

"The program was put in place just before this latest crisis with Iraq," Kirsch said. "The brutality of the occupation caused a great deal of psychological trauma, which is severely exacerbated by Saddam Hussein's continuing threats and the renewed U.S. bombings."

Besides war-related stress, the rigors of everyday life in the Gulf region can take their toll. For example, Kirsch said, older people worry about being unable to practice their religion because of physical limitations.

"One day they had scheduled me for 60 patients, all women," said Kirsch, a Marina Del Rey resident. "A lot of them were older. They all had stress. They also had pain in the knees--they pray six times a day--and they feel very bad if they cannot get into the correct praying position."

Kirsch hooked up the patients to his Alpha-Stim. The device reduces pain by directing minute currents of electricity to parts of the body via self-adhesive electrodes or probes.

Kirsch contends that the body heals itself naturally by electrical communication, when one cell is stimulated to function normally and then relays the information to another cell. The cells "speak" to each other through frequencies, and pain interrupts the ability of cells to communicate. The Alpha-Stim allows the body to "hear" the correct frequencies again and readjust toward a normal, pain-free state, he said.

When the device's electrodes are attached to a patient's ear lobes, it looks as if the patient is listening to a cassette recorder with earphones.

Under U.S. federal law, the device, which costs \$750, can only be purchased with a prescription from a licensed health care professional. More than 10,000 of the devices have been sold in the United States since its technology was first approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1983.

Bassam Hassounah, general manager of Kuwaiti-owned American Exports Co., helped coordinate Kirsch's October trip to Kuwait. Hassounah, whose Massachusetts-based company exports American automobiles to the Middle East, said the Gulf War's psychological effects on the Kuwaitis illustrated the need for new therapeutic approaches to stress-related symptoms.

"Traditional therapies were not helping that much," Hassounah said. "Kuwait's population was suffering from a lot of anxiety symptoms, depression, things related to the effects of the war. The need for something (new) seemed to be obvious."

Kirsch led a three-day seminar for more than 400 Kuwaiti doctors, many of whom were openly skeptical of his product.

"In the beginning, they were not very enthusiastic," said Hassounah. "When they saw the results on the people treated, they were more convinced. By the time the visit was concluded, everybody seemed very pleased."

In a 1986 study, Peter M. Roth, an Agoura Hills orthodontist, concluded that use of an Alpha-Stim helped relieve the pain of patients fitted for braces.

"I was impressed with it at the time and it has great application" for use in dentistry, Roth said.

Stephen J. Overcash, a licensed clinical psychologist who used an Alpha-Stim in a 1989 published study concerning electrotherapy and its effects on substance abusers, said he uses the instrument to treat about 10 patients a week in his private practice in Chambersburg, Pa.

"I've had very good results with it," Overcash said. "It seems very good at taking people who are upset, anxious and calming them down."