



spotlight on health

New Hope For Children With Difficult-To-Treat Epilepsy

(NAPSA)—An estimated 422,000 American children under age 18 have been diagnosed with epilepsy. In addition, of the 125,000 new cases of epilepsy that develop each year, up to 50 percent are in children and adolescents.

Nearly 20 percent of people with epilepsy will not be helped by traditional antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) and will continue to have seizures. This means that children with severe cases of epilepsy can have hundreds of seizures a day without relief. Prolonged seizures can lead to brain damage and even death.

Antiepileptic drugs, specialized diets and brain surgery have long been considered the only options for treating children with epilepsy. When these methods fail, parents of children with difficult-to-treat epilepsy are left with little hope that their children will ever lead normal lives.

These children often have difficulties concentrating and socializing. They may also have memory and developmental problems, as well as experience anxiety about having seizures at school.

According to a study published in the *Journal of Child Neurology*, there is a different treatment that may offer new hope to these children and their parents. Researchers at the Emory University School of Medicine have found that Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS) appears to be a safe and highly effective treatment for chil-



Recent study findings show that a treatment called vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) is effective for children with refractory epilepsy.

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Study leader Sandra Helmers, M.D., says, “Findings from this study reveal that VNS is as effective at controlling seizures in children as it is in adults. This means that thousands of children who would otherwise have uncontrollable epilepsy on medication or other therapies will be given new hope.”

VNS works by stimulating the brain with electrical impulses through the use of a pacemaker-like device implanted in the left side of the chest. An electrode from the device wraps around the vagus nerve and provides electrical stimulation to the brain.

Currently, VNS is only indicated for use in people over 12 years of age with partial epilepsy

(seizures that involve only part of the brain); however, the new data shows that VNS is safe for use even in children younger than 12 years old. In these children, seizure frequency was dramatically reduced as a result of using VNS and quality of life improved significantly in terms of alertness, verbal communication, school performance and recovery times.

College student Kristen Peters says that the quality of her life has improved dramatically since she was implanted with VNS at age 16.

“I was diagnosed with epilepsy at age 15, and because of my seizures I was not able to do things other kids were doing, like participate in sports at school or go to dances,” she says. “I couldn’t get my driver’s license, or even go anywhere alone, for fear I would have a seizure when I was by myself. Thanks to VNS I don’t have any more seizures and now attend college away from home—something I wasn’t sure I would ever be able to do.”

VNS is currently approved in the United States for the treatment of refractory epilepsy in people 12 years of age or older, and is undergoing clinical trials for the treatment of chronic depression, Alzheimer’s disease, anxiety disorders, chronic headache/migraine and obesity.

To learn more about VNS, visit the Epilepsy Foundation Web site at www.efa.org.