

# NAMI WICHITA SYNAPSE

## BRIDGING THE GAP IN EDUCATION

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### TREATING DEPRESSION

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS) Therapy, the first implantable device for depression and the first therapy specifically designed, studied and labeled as a long term treatment option for patients with treatment resistant depression. VNS Therapy is intended for patients 18 years of age and older who are experiencing a major depressive episode and have not had an adequate response to four or more adequate antidepressant treatments. VNS Therapy was approved for the treatment of pharmacoresistant epilepsy in 1997.

Major depressive disorder affects nearly 19 million Americans every year. Of those approximately four million people experience depression that does not respond to multiple antidepressant treatments. For these people, treatments including psychotherapy, antidepressant medications and even electroconvulsive therapy do not work, or they work for a short while, then stop working over time. The availability of VNS Therapy is an important breakthrough for these people.

In clinical studies of VNS Therapy, more than half of the patients realized some meaningful benefit, one third of the patients had at least a 50 percent improvement in their depression, and 1 out of 6 were depression-free after one year and two years of treatment with VNS Therapy. These patients had experienced depression for an average of 25 years in spite of trying a multitude of antidepressant treatments.

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Patients also reported significant improvements in quality-of-life areas, such as vitality, mental health, emotional well-being and social functioning.

VNS Therapy is delivered from a small pacemaker-like device implanted in the chest area that sends mild pulses to the brain via the vagus nerve in the neck. A thin, thread-like wire, attached to the generator, runs under the skin to the left vagus nerve. The vagus nerve, one of the 12 cranial nerves, serves as the body's "information highway" connecting the brain to many major organs. Several studies have shown that VNS Therapy may modulate neurotransmitters such as serotonin and norepinephrine thought to be involved in mood regulation. The battery lasts from three to eight years, depending on the dose settings. Side effects associated with VNS Therapy are typically mild, happen during stimulation and decrease over time. The most commonly reported side effects include hoarseness and shortness of breath.

Cyberonics, the manufacturer of VNS Therapy, is currently working with insurance companies and other third party payers to gain full coverage for VNS Therapy. Today, companies are covering VNS Therapy on a case by case basis. With VNS Therapy for epilepsy, the majority of payers reimburse for the procedure, as well as Medicare and Medicaid in most states. It is anticipated that the experience in depression will be similar in time. For more information ask your doctor or visit [www.vnstherapy.com](http://www.vnstherapy.com) or call 1-877-NOW-4-VNS.