

Vagal nerve stimulation receives new application

Procedure can now be used for depression, FDA said

WRITTEN BY **MARC DAVID**

PRACTITIONERS HAVE FOUND methods of dealing with depression that have improved symptoms among sufferers.

Vagal nerve stimulation (VNS) is a new tool in the box. VNS, which has been used effectively with epileptics, was recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration for treatment of depression. A battery generator is placed under the skin on the left side of the chest and a lead connects the generator to the vagus nerve in the neck where a small connection is wrapped around the nerve.

Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) can be effective in treating patients with psychotic depression and suicidal patients. ECT is a shock treatment that induces a mal seizure in the brain, similar to epileptic convulsions where the brain's pathways all fire at the same time. To be effective, a series of ECT treatments are required and a seizure must occur with each treatment, according to vagus-nervestimulator.com.

Laura Schneider, 34, a technical writer from Eden Prairie, Minn., has battled depression for the majority of her life. Her official

diagnosis came in 1993. She was angry and miserable, often crying for hours on end. She ended in the hospital at the University of Minnesota, where she was treated with VNS therapy, getting her implant in September 2000.

"The device saved my life," Schneider said. "I am alive today because of my participation in the VNS study."

Schneider is very open about her condition and appreciative of the positive changes in her life. She notes that the study she participated in, which took place from 2000 until the FDA approved VNS, was for the "hopeless cases, for those who were essentially written off by three to five psychiatrists. That's a very small percentage of those who suffer depression."

"I am a happy, optimistic person with severe life-threatening depression," she said, in self assessment.

Today, Schneider still takes medication for her depression. The computer and battery the size of an old-fashioned stopwatch is implanted in her body between her heart and collarbone and will need to be

checked periodically, but she reports there is little scarring to let others know about the device. Most of all, she is more in control of herself. ■



