

By James Bradshaw
Senior Editor

Columbus, Ohio – Can an electronic gadget no larger than a pocket-sized tape recorder treat many cases of chronic pain, anxiety, depression or insomnia as effectively as drugs?

Its manufacturer and a major distributor of the brain stimulating Alpha-Stim 100 make that claim, and an Ohio psychologist with clinical experience both in private practice and as a veteran of two tours in Iraq as an Army Reserve psychologist agrees with them.

Kathy Platoni, Psy.D., is a reserve colonel with the Army's 307th Medical Group and has a private practice in

Brain stimulator's effects highly praised

Centerville, Ohio, specializing in treating chronic pain and depressive and anxiety disorders. She said in 16 years of using the devices with both civilian and military patients she has observed only positive results.

"The success rate I've seen has just been phenomenal," Platoni told fellow psychologists at a workshop of the Ohio Psychological Association's 2007 convention held Oct. 24-26.

Platoni and Karl Moeller, owner of Moeller Medical LLC of Cincinnati, which sells the devices, demonstrated the



Kathy Platoni, Psy.D.

Alpha-Stim 100 and discussed its successes since it was introduced 29 years ago by Electromedical Products Inc. of Mineral Wells, Texas.

Platoni emphasized that she receives no money from Moeller or EPI and promotes the devices only because she has found them extremely effective while carrying none of the complications of psychoactive drugs.

Moeller said the Alpha-Stim 100 produces cranial electrotherapy stimulation (CES) that increases soothing alpha waves in the brain. "The most significant side effect we have heard is lightheadedness or a slight dizziness that can be eliminated by adjusting down the power," he said.

CES is FDA-approved for treating anxiety, depression and insomnia, Moeller said. The Alpha-Stim 100 costs \$495 and operates on a 9 volt battery. It has five settings to adjust to the patient's comfort level and sessions vary from 20 minutes to an hour and may be recommended for weekly or daily use depending on the client's needs.

"Most patients do not respond unless they are treated daily for three weeks," Moeller added.

Daily use is not a problem since the device is simple to operate and the health care professional can easily loan, rent or sell an Alpha-Stim 100 to a client for home use.

Platoni said neither Medicare nor Medicaid will approve payment for the devices but with EPI's help she has negotiated payments as "durable medical equipment" from several other state, federal and private insurance plans so that the majority of her clients now have the devices.

To use an Alpha-Stim 100 a client attaches small clips to the earlobes, turns on the power and adjusts the power setting as desired.

The lack of side effects meets the "do no harm" clause of the Hippocratic Oath, but Moeller admitted that how the device brings about positive results is not fully understood.

The micro current appears to stimulate nerve cells in the brain, producing

serotonin and acetylcholine which modulates brain waves and produces an alpha state that brings about feelings of calmness and relaxation to improve mental focus, he said.

He added that the only contraindications are that patients are told not to drive or operate machinery while using the devices and they are not recommended for use by patients who are pregnant or have a pacemaker installed.

Platoni said EPI donated refurbished devices that were very helpful in reducing stress for combat soldiers during her stints in Iraq. She said the Alpha-Stim 100s were advantageous compared to medications because medical supplies are sporadic in combat situations, making prescription refills often unavailable.

She said young soldiers who grew up in the computer age are attracted to "gadgets," which led many of them to come in who might not otherwise have sought out mental health services. As in her private practice, she said she used the devices in conjunction with other therapy.

In her civilian practice she conducted a self-reporting survey among 24 clients with the following results: 50 percent reported improved pain control, 100 percent experienced decreased anxiety, 79 percent said symptoms of depression were reduced and 77 percent reported improvements in sleeping patterns.

"The results are cumulative," Platoni said. "I do recommend they continue using it because it can't hurt you and you get that alpha state of being relaxed but alert." She added that in many instances symptoms recur if sessions are discontinued, although patients usually can be placed on a reduced maintenance schedule after initial improvement.

Platoni presented a slide presentation on the results in several individual case studies. The most dramatic case involved a patient with major depressive and paranoid delusional disorders.

She said when treatment began the patient was so impaired that he was described in lay terms as catatonic and depressed to the point of immobilization. Following treatment he was no longer mute, became conversant and interacted socially, including attending church, no longer paced in an agitated state, exercised three to four times weekly and was able to drive himself to his therapy sessions.

"In the words of his spouse, he once again approximated the husband she lost after years of overmedication and medication combinations that left him in a state described as 'stuporous,' nonfunctional and unable to relate to the rest of his world."

However, Platoni said when he stopped using CES for four weeks for unknown reasons, "his symptoms returned full force."

More information from the manufacturer is available at www.alpha-stim.com

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