

TMS CLINIC OPEN IN EUGENE

*The high-tech procedure
offers a new therapy
for people with depression*

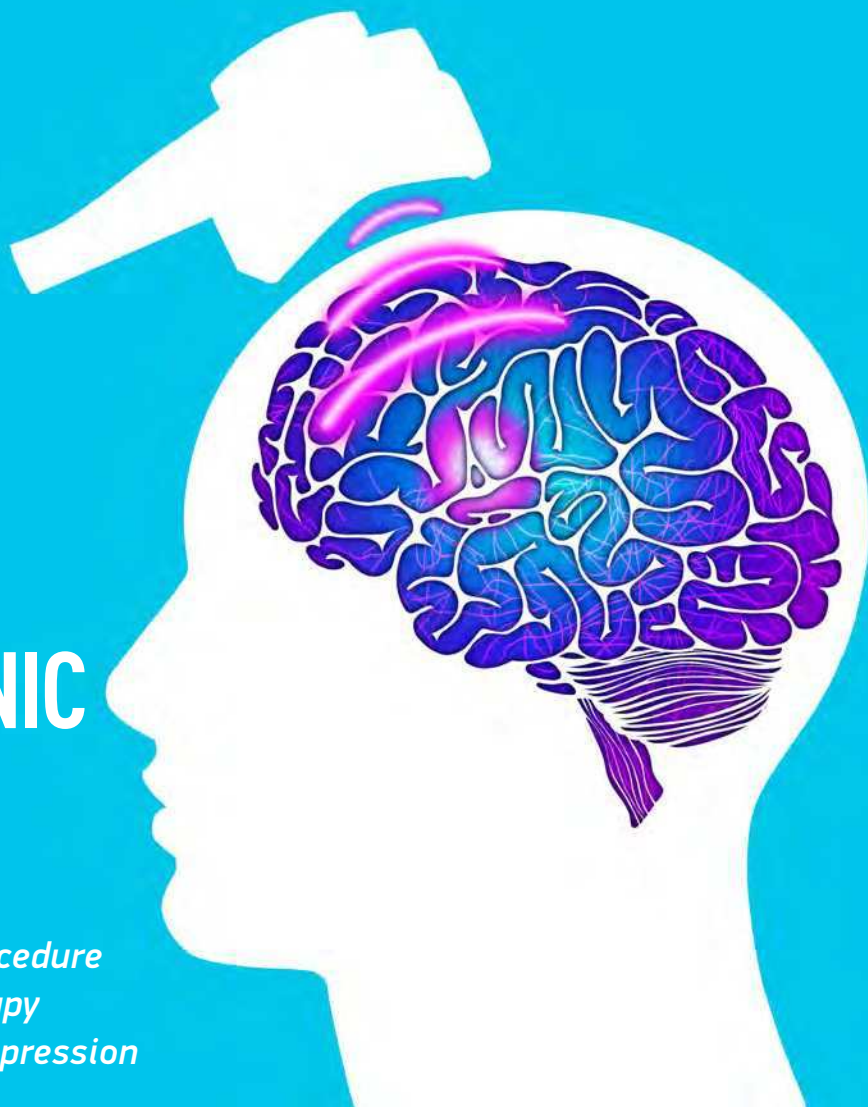


ILLUSTRATION BY CHELSEA LOVEJOY

When medications and psychotherapy fail to offer much relief for people suffering from depression, a relatively unknown therapy called transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) might provide an alternative choice for patients in Lane County.

Emerald TMS opened its Eugene clinic in June, and the doctors involved hope this non-invasive treatment will make a difference in the treatment of depression.

Transcranial magnetic stimulation uses a machine to transmit electromagnetic pulses to the brain. The idea is that the pulses target the area in the brain believed to cause depression. As a practice, TMS received approval from the FDA in 2008.

These treatments last 4-6 weeks, with the patient coming in every day for about 20-40 minutes. There are mini-

mal side effects, and people can easily return to their daily activities, the Mayo Clinic says.

The technician who runs the machines at Emerald TMS, Brendan Curran, compared TMS to opening up new paths in the brain.

"We are stimulating the neuro pathways," Curran says. "It's like cutting through brush and creating a new path. If you do it over again, the path becomes smoother and smoother. If you are breaking the consistency, you are not going to get as quickly to that spot."

To qualify for TMS treatment, a patient must suffer from major depression and have tried several medicines. Symptoms of major depression can be subjective but usually include lack of appetite, low mood, apathy, suicidal thoughts and loss of sleep, as well as feelings of guilt or hopelessness.

Dr. Jocelyn Bonner, medical director of Emerald TMS, is in charge of screening patients. She meets with them to evaluate whether they fit the criteria, which include looking at information from a patient's doctor.

Bonner says she hopes TMS eventually becomes a first line in treatment, though insurance providers still require that patients try several medications before using the relatively new treatment.

"It seems to be effective on a lot of people," says Dr. Roger Hall, founder of Emerald TMS. "For some people, it is lifesaving. A lot of patients are no longer suicidal or have sleep deprivation."

Hall brought TMS treatment to Eugene after watching a friend suffer from significant clinical depression, with no relief from medications.

"I talked to him about treatments," Hall says. "I ran across transcranial magnetic stimulation and checked out their website. I decided it would be a therapy that might help him."

Previously, doctors who had prescribed TMS treatment could only send patients to Portland or Medford, which are the closest clinics to Eugene. Because TMS is a daily treatment, it makes it difficult for patients to commute and it disrupts their day-to-day life.

In order to have the most effective treatment, patients are advised to not miss treatment days. Additionally, Hall says usually people don't feel any change in their symptoms until about four weeks into treatment.

"You don't suddenly wake up and run a marathon," he says. "But you do wake up and feel better. Family and friends say you look better."

In TMS research conducted by Stanford and the Mayo Clinic, 35-40 percent of patients have remission for depression. An additional 30 percent or more show significant improvements.

The main issue Emerald TMS faces right now is a lack of patients. Lack of awareness about the treatment is a factor, as is the different hoops people have to jump through to get it. The process of being screened and receiving insurance approval can take a while, as well.

"It's a major delay and it's understandable, but it does take quite a while," says Hall.

At this point, Emerald TMS has only seven patients, with an additional four about to begin treatment; there is also a separate list of patients awaiting approval from their insurance companies. Bonnor says she is hopeful that as awareness rises, more doctors will recommend TMS for their patients.

"I think when you are that motivated for something new that's been helping you, you get yourself there," she says. ■

Emerald TMS is at 1140 Willagillespie Road, Suite 44, in Eugene. Call 541-735-3241 for information.

INVISIBLE BUT STILL HERE

*People living in cars and on couches
are still a part of Eugene's unhoused community*

"The housing and homelessness crisis are the same thing," says Kevin Cronin, a member of the Eugene Housing Policy Board's renters' protection task force. "We have homeless people because of a lack of housing."

When thinking about the homeless crisis, the first thing that might come to mind are people who are chronically homeless — on the streets and inevitably very visible. But we have a second crisis of people who are episodically homeless on a short-term basis, living in vehicles or crashing on friends' couches.

According to a study published in October last year by ECONorthwest about the Portland area's homeless population, this second crisis of less visible, more short-term homelessness affects tens of thousands of households.

The study notes that in 2015 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development found that 125,000 renter households in the Portland Metro Area had "very low income." Only about a quarter of those low-income households received federal housing assistance. Forty-five percent (56,000 households) had no assistance and "severe housing problems" such as paying more than half of income on rent and utilities — leaving them very vulnerable to episodic homelessness.

Local homeless advocates like Cronin say this crisis is affecting a variety of people in Eugene, including those who are employed and even students, due to issues like high cost of living, hefty application fees and our current "landlord's market."

Cronin says one of the most affordable ways to create new housing is through ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units

— such as mother-in-law units or tiny homes on already existing properties). Though, he says, the construction of new ADUs has been slow-going.

"The city of Eugene has approved two permits for ADUs in the last year," Cronin says.

With the current rental vacancies Eugene does have, renters are often overwhelmed by application fees and moving costs.

"Many times renters pay \$200 to \$300 in application fees. It takes quite a bit to move into a new place," Cronin says. "And so a lot of folks are staying on people's couches — we call them 'the invisible homeless.'"

These are typically people who have jobs, he says, but who still can't find a place to live in the area's current housing market.

"I've had three folks stay on my couch in the last year who have a job and have savings and have applied for more than 10 apartments and can't find a place to live," he says. "You have landlords picking and choosing. It's definitely a landlord's market."

Cronin says for people in this position, one of the leading

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