

# HEALTH

## Local Epilepsy Center Brings Patient Relief

### Surgical procedure reduces seizures

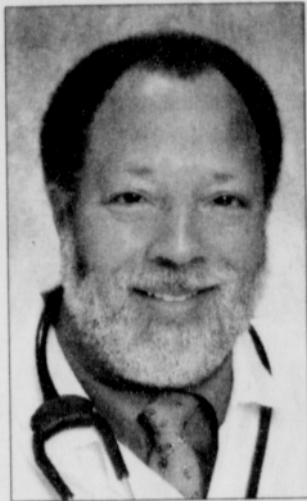
Diagnosed with epilepsy 11 years ago, Brianne Simpkins had tried several different kinds of anti-epileptic medications in an attempt to control her seizures without enduring success.

"I was frustrated and at a point where I needed something permanent to help me with my condition, an option that would enable me to take care of my family, to be healthy for my young son," she says.

Time will tell, but Simpkins may be headed on the right path, toward her goal of a more simplified life that is under control.

A surgical procedure to reduce seizures is now available to patients at the Providence Epilepsy Center, part of the Providence Brain Institute and based at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center. Simpkins was one of the initial patients to undergo the operation.

Called Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS), "it has been clinically proven to decrease, and in some cases, eliminate, seizures by conditioning the brain to better react to the interruptions in brain function common in epilepsy," says Dr.



Dr. Mark Yerby

Mark Yerby, medical director of the Providence Epilepsy Center. "Furthermore, many VNS patients have been found to benefit from improved cognitive function including increased alertness, concentration and mood."

After headaches, epilepsy is the most common neurological condition, outnumbering stroke, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis. It is a disorder

whereby recurrent seizures are caused by excessive electrical discharges from

the central nervous system.

VNS therapy consists of an implanted generator - a small, battery-operated, pacemaker-like device that delivers intermittent electrical stimulation to the patient's left vagus nerve, which activates various areas of the brain.

Trained neuro- and vascular surgeons, working in concert with Dr. Yerby, perform the procedure. The generator is implanted in the patient's left chest area, with small thread-like wires and spring-shaped electrodes running under the skin and wrapped around the left vagus nerve in the neck.

After implantation, the generator must be programmed to deliver a precise amount of electrical stimulation intermittently. This

is done using a computer and hand-held "wand." The wand is placed over the patient, above where the generator has been implanted, and programming takes approximately 15 minutes. VNS electrical output is gradually increased by reprogramming monthly, over four to five months, all of which is done in the doctor's office.

"VNS has evolved into a mainstream therapy that offers most patients long-term improvements in seizure control and quality of life," says Dr. Yerby. "Practitioners have an increased understanding of how VNS works, which patients best respond to the therapy and how to treat patients with it, given ongoing clinical studies, research and data."

## Potential Deaths from Bird Flu Alarm

### Number depends on when pandemic begins in Asia

(AP) — The World Health Organization moved Friday to revise alarming predictions that a pandemic stemming from the bird flu virus ravaging parts of Asia could kill as many as 150 million people.

A flu spokesman at the agency's Geneva headquarters did not say the 150 million prediction was wrong, but emphasized that 7.4 million deaths is a more

realistic estimate.

Scientists have made predictions ranging from less than 2 million to 360 million. Last year, WHO's chief for the Asia-Pacific region predicted 100 million deaths, but until now that was the highest figure publicly mentioned by a WHO official.

"We're not going to know how lethal the next pandemic is going to be until the pandemic begins," WHO influenza spokesman Dick Thompson said Friday.

"You could pick almost any number" until then, he said, adding that WHO "can't be dragged into further scaremongering."

Experts agree there will certainly be another flu pandemic - a new human flu strain that goes global. However, it is unknown when or how bad that global epidemic will be.

It also is unknown whether the H5N1 bird flu strain circulating in Asian poultry now will be the origin of the next pandemic. But experts are tracking it just in case, and governments across the world are preparing themselves for such a possibility.

Two factors will have a major influence on how many people will die from the next



Mutiara Gayatri, 6, a victim of bird flu, lies on a bed at a hospital in Jakarta, Indonesia.

flu pandemic, experts say. One is the attack rate - the proportion of the population that become infected. The other is the death rate, or the proportion of the sick who die.

## Vaccine Stops Cervical Cancer

(AP) — The first major study of an experimental vaccine to prevent cervical cancer found it was 100 percent effective, in the short term, at blocking the disease and lesions likely to turn cancerous.

The drugmaker Merck & Co. said Gardasil, a genetically engineered vaccine, blocks infection with two of the 100-plus types of human papilloma virus, HPV 16 and 18. The two sexually transmitted viruses together cause about 70 percent of cervical cancers.

Other types of HPV also can cause cervical cancer and painful genital warts. About 20 million Americans have some form of HPV.

The final-stage study of Gardasil included 10,559 sexually active women ages 16 to 26 in the United States and 12 other countries who were not infected with HPV 16 or 18. Half got three vaccine doses over six months; half got dummy shots.

Among those still virus-free after the six months, none who received the vaccine developed cervical cancer or precancerous lesions, compared with 21 who got dummy shots.

"To have 100 percent efficacy is something that you have very rarely," Dr. Eliav Barr, Merck's head of clinical development for Gardasil. "We're breaking out the champagne."

## Flu Shot Clinics to Open

Kaiser Permanente will offer free flu shots to its health plan members at highest-risk for complications from influenza during special clinics on Saturday, Oct. 15 from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. After that, flu shots will be given on a drop-in basis weekdays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

All Kaiser Permanente members will be able to receive flu shots starting Monday, Oct. 24 and continuing through the flu season.

The shots are especially recommended for those at highest risk from influenza: people 65 or older; children ages 6-23 months; residents of nursing home and

other long-term care facilities; anyone ages 2-64 with chronic health problems, such as diabetes, heart disease, or asthma; women who will be pregnant during the flu season; out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than 6 months of age; and health care workers with direct patient contact.

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it takes one to two weeks after being vaccinated for antibodies against influenza to develop and provide protection. The flu season typically peaks between December and March, so patients at highest risk are encouraged to get their flu shot in October or early November.

## Asbestos Exposure Warning

Oregon health officials are warning employees of a former north Portland vermiculite processing plant that they may have been exposed to asbestos.

Between 1968 and 1974, Supreme Perlite, located at 4600 N. Suttle Rd., processed more than 600 tons of vermiculite attic insulation taken from a mine in Libby, Mont. The vermiculite from Libby was found to contain asbestos.

Additionally, household family members were likely to have been

exposed to asbestos fibers that workers brought home on their clothing and hair.

"Former workers and household members may be at higher risk for certain health effects," said Amanda Guay of the Oregon Department of Human Services. "We recommend that anyone who may have been exposed learn more about asbestos and see a doctor with experience in asbestos-related lung disease."

For more information, call DHS at 503-731-4025.

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