

# PAIN KILLER

## Spinal cord stimulation tricks the brain

By **PAULA VESS**  
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**SHELBY** – The human body's nervous system is a complex communication system that sends millions of messages throughout our bodies every day.

Some messages tell our lungs to inhale and exhale, our arms and legs to move, and our eyes to blink. Other messages help us identify the things we see, hear and touch.

The nervous system also has a built-in alarm to warn us of injury or illness.

When we experience pain, it is the body's way of telling us we have touched a hot surface, stepped on a nail, sprained our ankle or that we have the flu. Pain lets us know we need to take some action.

Most of the time pain is acute. It comes on suddenly, due to disease or an injury, and can be diagnosed and treated. Once the cause of the pain is treated, we get better and the pain goes away.

However, sometimes people suffer from another type of pain.

Chronic pain can start as acute pain from an injury or illness but last much longer, and can be resistant to medical treatment.

Chronic pain can create severe problems for people, causing them to alter their normal activities or even avoid doing things they once enjoyed. "Chronic pain takes a toll on people. They can become depressed because it limits their activities and social interactions," said Felix Muniz, MD, a physician in the pain management center at Kings Mountain Hospital. "When friends and family don't understand how the person is feeling it can even lead to isolation."

AV Justice, a current patient at KMH's pain management center, has dealt with the effects of chronic pain in his back and legs for years. "I was always busy doing something, but the pain got so bad I couldn't do a lot of things any more."

Chronic low back or neck pain can be related to joints, degenerative discs in the back, and even problems from other organs that cause pain to radiate to other areas of the body.

Justice's problems began more than 50 years ago when the ladder he was standing on to paint his house collapsed. "The ladder went through the ground and there I went. I fell on my feet and started rolling; I knew there was a paint bucket and a ladder coming behind me."

Over the years, he began experiencing back pain and pain in his left leg. Eventually, he developed pain in



AV Justice of Shelby feels a tingling sensation in his legs instead of pain thanks to a spinal cord stimulator.

his right leg as well. "The pain came on gradually, getting worse all the time."

Several years ago, Justice's family physician

fuses or tricks the brain," stated Joy Bumgardner, RN-BSN, nurse manager at the pain management center. "Instead of feeling pain patients describe feeling a tingling or

almost 10 years.

Newer devices also give the patient more control over the area receiving the electrical current and the strength of the current. "In the past, we had to increase the intensity of stimulators for both sides if pain was worse on one side," stated Dr. Muniz, "Now we can adjust the current for individual areas."

Justice, who has an older model, can increase or decrease the stimulation and turn it on or off depending on his needs.

He visits the pain clinic every few months for a check-up, "I haven't been anywhere that's been that nice. You can't beat them."

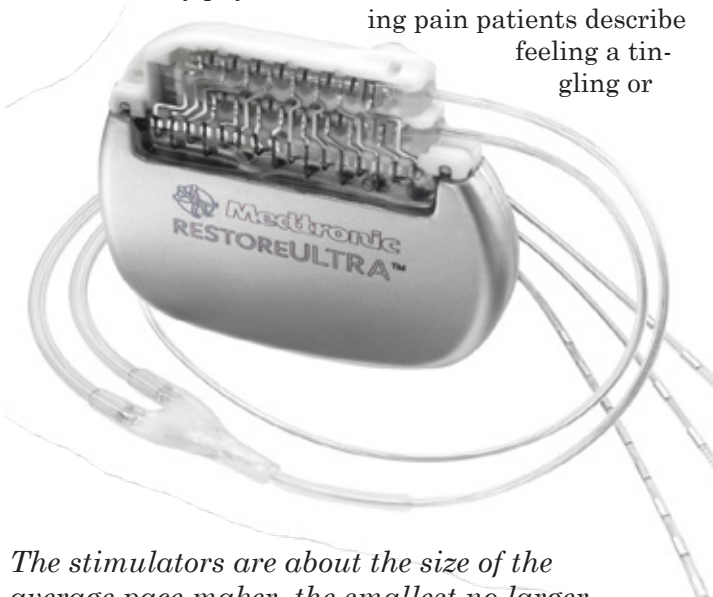
Although many patients have benefited from spinal cord stimulation, the treatment is not for everyone.

"With the newer advanced technologies offered these days by the different companies that manufacture spinal cord stimulators, it is now even possible to have a spinal cord stimulator that is MRI compatible, as well as pacemaker and cardiac defibrillators compatible," said Dr. Muniz.

Patients who suffer from chronic kidney stones that require lithotripsy, may not be good candidates for this option.

Your physician will determine if your specific condition may be treated by a spinal cord stimulator.

*Kings Mountain Hospital's pain management center is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. They treat all chronic pain conditions in patients 18 years and older. For more information call 980-487-5500.*



The stimulators are about the size of the average pace maker, the smallest no larger than a silver dollar.

referred him to the pain management center at Kings Mountain Hospital where Dr. Muniz and the clinic's staff work with Justice to relieve his pain.

When other treatments didn't provide lasting relief, Dr. Muniz offered Justice the option of a spinal cord stimulator.

This device is implanted in the body and sends electrical currents to the spinal column. "A stimulator sends tiny electrical impulses to the spinal cord, blocking the pain signal before it gets to the brain," said Dr. Muniz.

Stimulators can help with pain in the lower back and legs and also the neck and arms. They are often used to relieve lumbar or cervical pain, diabetic or chemotherapy-related neuropathy, vascular insufficiency and other chronic pain conditions when the pain is caused by the body's nerves. The devices do not help pain from bones or muscles.

"The stimulator con-

buzzing sensation."

About 10 percent of the pain center's patients benefit from a spinal cord stimulator. "It is used after other interventional procedures, medication management and previous surgery have failed," stated Bumgardner, "We trial patients with the implant after they have gone through a screening process."

Patients go through a screening process because "we want to make sure the patient can have a good outcome," said Dr. Muniz, "We also want to make sure they understand what to expect. Patients should expect about 50 percent relief from their pain."

Spinal cord stimulation technology has been around about 30 years and has improved dramatically over time.

Today's stimulators are about the size of the average pace maker, the smallest no larger than a silver dollar, and they operate from rechargeable batteries that can last

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### Breastfeeding Support Group & Mom to Mom Support Group

September 1: 10 a.m. – Noon  
Women's Life Center  
Conference Room  
Open to all breastfeeding mothers and nursing babies and expectant moms who are interested in breastfeeding. For more information, please call 980-487-3887 and 980-487-3983 to register.

### Healthy Hearts Support Group

September 1: Noon  
CRMC T. R. Harris  
Conference Center  
The topic will be "Batting the Blues." For more information, please call 980-487-3659.

### Pink Ribbon Network

September 3: Noon - 1 p.m.  
CRMC Oncology Services  
Board Room  
Lori Scism, RN; Dottie Parker, RN and Rita Wortman, RN, will talk about "Chemotherapy & Radiation Side Effects and Chemo Brain." The Network is a gathering for newly diagnosed breast cancer patients. Lunch served. To register, please call 980-487-3757.

### Bridges

September 13: 2 – 3 p.m.  
CRMC Cancer Center  
A special educational program to aid recovery during the post-operative period after a mastectomy or lumpectomy. Register two weeks after mastectomy or lumpectomy by calling 980-487-3757.

### WINGS Cancer Support Group

September 13: 6 p.m.  
CRMC Cancer Center  
A support group for patients with all types of cancer. School nurse Cathy Lineberger, RN, will have reflections of her recent trip to Haiti. For more information, please call 980-487-3025.

### Diabetes Support Group

September 14: 5:30 p.m.  
CRMC Auditorium  
"Come Explore CRMC's New Wellness Center" with Johnny Stamey, Cardiovascular Services Manager. For more information, please call 980-487-3953.

### Car Seat Safety Class

September 16: 5:15 p.m.  
CRMC Women's Life  
Center Conference Room  
Information on current laws and how to keep your new baby safe while traveling. To register, please call 980-487-3983.

### Walk for Hope and 5k Run

September 18 - 8 a.m.  
Shelby City Park  
Call 980-487-3772 for more information.

### Kangaroo Kapers

September 20 - 6 p.m.  
Women's Life Center  
Conference Room  
Provides children expecting a brother or sister a positive introduction to the hospital and to what life will be like with a new baby. Pre-registration is required. Please call 980-487-3983.



**Shelby City Park**  
**Saturday, September 18, 2010**

Living & Coping  
With Cancer

Cleveland County  
HealthCare System

Please call  
**980-487-3772**  
for more information

Registration 8:00am-9:30am  
\$10 for Walkers • \$25 for Runners

Includes a Free T-Shirt

5k Run-9:00 am • Walk 10:00-2:00 pm

Each team is encouraged to raise \$500