Neurosurgery One

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Provider Tip Sheet: Overcoming Patient Objections to Spinal Cord Stimulation for Painful Peripheral Neuropathy

Peripheral neuropathy can cause debilitating pain in the hands and feet, significantly impacting a patient's quality of life. Spinal cord stimulation (SCS), a minimally invasive treatment, offers relief by interrupting pain signals; however, some patients have misperceptions or concerns. This sheet can help you address some common concerns.

Key Talking Points

- Effective Alternative When Medications Fail: SCS offers an alternative when conservative treatments fail, providing hope for patients struggling with chronic pain. SCS has been FDA-approved since 1989 to treat chronic pain and has evolved to become smaller, safer, and more convenient. The FDA expanded approval in 2023 to treat painful diabetic neuropathy. SCS was found to have positive long-term benefits for many patients with painful diabetic neuropathy, reducing pain by up to 75% as well as decreasing hospitalizations.
- Minimally Invasive Procedure: SCS is a minimally invasive procedure. SCS consists of a small paddle or leads that are placed on the spinal cord and controlled by a pacemaker-like generator implanted under the skin. The device sends tiny electrical impulses, which reduce or block pain signals from reaching the brain. Patients can adjust stimulation levels, using a wireless remote, even turning it off when not needed.
- Trial Period Assurance: All qualified patients receive a temporary external trial, which ensures they are happy with the results before implantation.
- Patient Support: Patients receive support from a team, including the expertise of interventional pain management physicians and neurosurgeons, and assistance from device representatives for programming and adapting to the stimulation.
- Pain Relief Expectations: Manage patient expectations by explaining that the **goal is to reduce pain by 50-75%,** recognizing that each individual's response may vary.

Addressing Common Concerns

Concern: Fear of constant electrical stimulation.

- **Response**: Patients can control when and how much stimulation they receive, making it adaptable to their pain levels and activities.

Concern: Uncertainty about the effectiveness of spinal cord stimulation.

- **Response**: Many patients experience a significant reduction in pain, with up to 75% relief. A trial period is conducted before permanent implantation to ensure efficacy.
    - A 2021 randomized controlled trial for painful diabetic neuropathy reported patient's mean pain score went from 7.6 at baseline to 1.7 at 6 months with high-frequency spinal cord stimulation.

Concern: Apprehension about surgery and recovery.

- **Response**: The surgical procedure is outpatient, taking 1-2 hours, and patients often return home the same day. Recovery is relatively quick, with most patients resuming light activities within two weeks.