

HouseCall

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No seizures, no side effects

Treatment for epilepsy



By **Matthew Smyth, M.D.**
Neurology

Epilepsy isn't a rare condition, affecting about 1 percent of the U.S. population, and seizures take many forms. They can be subtle ("petit mal/absence," staring spells) or dramatic ("grand mal,"

generalized tonic-clonic convulsions). Other seizures may occur with a patient aware or semi-aware of them (partial or complex-partial seizures). While many patients achieve control of their seizures with anticonvulsant medication, 25 percent to 35 percent continue to have seizures despite multiple medications. These patients can experience significant medical and psychological issues.

Side effects of medications can include fatigue, dizziness, memory impairment and cognitive slowing, imbalance, bleeding problems and bone marrow suppression, skin and gum changes, and liver and kidney toxicity. Women of childbearing age in particular need to discuss medications that can affect a fetus with their neurologists.

HOPE FOR PATIENTS

Fortunately, new medications provide hope and improved seizure control for patients who have failed first-line or older anticonvulsants. In many cases, seizures can be controlled with the right anticonvulsant or combination of drugs with minimal or no side effects. For remaining patients with persistent seizures or side effects from existing medications, an aggressive approach for adjustment of seizure medication, or even referral to a surgical epilepsy center, may provide an opportunity to better control seizures and restore quality of life.

Evaluation at a comprehensive epilepsy center includes a clinical evaluation by an epileptologist (a neurologist physician specializing in epilepsy and related disorders), neuropsychological testing, magnetic resonance imaging, electroencephalography and, in some cases, specialized imaging tests such as magneto-encephalography, positron emission tomography or single-photon emission computed tomography. Each of these tests helps identify the brain's target zone, where the seizures arise.

In many cases, the seizure zone can be identified, then removed or disconnected with epilepsy surgery. With



About the author

Matthew Smyth, M.D., is an associate professor of neurosurgery and director of the pediatric epilepsy surgery program at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. He chairs the Professional Education Committee of the Epilepsy Foundation of the St. Louis Region professional advisory board.

modern techniques, epilepsy surgery is quite safe and—depending on the nature of the seizure disorder—effective. Unexpected complications from surgery are rare, and success rates of seizure freedom can range from 60 percent to 90 percent, depending on the seizure type and location.

In addition to a number of different intracranial surgeries, some patients may be offered a device called a vagal nerve stimulator. This pacemaker-like device sends regular tiny electrical stimulations to a nerve in the neck, which project up to the brain and may reduce seizure frequency and severity in some patients. In other cases, dietary changes can result in improved seizure control. New anticonvulsants and surgical techniques continue to be developed, so any patient experiencing seizures should make sure his or her neurologist and primary physician have explored all options.



We care for you

For more information about seizures, call the Epilepsy Foundation of the St. Louis Region at (800) 264-6970. To find more health-related information, visit www.nermc.com.

MEET A PHYSICIAN

The experienced, dedicated physicians of Northeast Regional Medical Center can help keep you healthy. We'd like to introduce one of them to you.



ELIZABETH HORTON, M.D.
Neurology

Northeast Regional Medical Group
800 W. Jefferson St.
Kirksville
(660) 627-3363

Elizabeth Horton, M.D., joined Northeast Regional Medical Group in 2008 from a private practice in Cape Girardeau, Mo.

Dr. Horton earned her medical degree from the University of Chicago-Pritzker School of Medicine, where she also completed a neurology residency with a specialty in child neurology. Following her residency, Dr. Horton completed a fellowship in clinical neurophysiology at the Children's Hospital Los Angeles, affiliated with the University of Southern California. Dr. Horton is a member of the Child Neurology Society and serves on the board of the Epilepsy Foundation of the St. Louis Region.

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Dear neighbor,

It's nice to see sunshine in northeast Missouri after the long winter. Northeast Regional Medical Center (NRMC) has been busy improving health care:

- Recently, we opened our expanded critical care unit, enabling NRMC to care for 10 patients, which reduces the number of patients who have to be transferred. Our critical-care trained physicians and staff help keep patients close to home.
- We began a \$3.9 million renovation to our obstetrics department, featuring all private rooms, private baths, a new nursery and modern technology and surroundings. This project will also include new windows in our patient tower. The department should be ready for occupancy in October.
- We'll welcome back Wesley Ryle, M.D., family medicine physician, and his family to Kirksville in June. Dr. Ryle recently completed his obligation with the U.S. Army. Dr. Ryle will join Complete Family Medicine.

Mat Hardee, D.O., internal medicine physician, will join Northeast Regional Medical Group in July. He'll join Kevin Rhodes, D.O., in the Gutensohn Clinic. In October, they'll move to our new medical office building, which is currently under construction in the 1600 block of Baltimore.

This year, we expect to add orthopedic, cardiology and neurology specialists.

- Finally, NRMC was named to the 100 Top Hospitals list by Thomson Reuters and an Everest Award winner in March. The Top Hospital Award recognizes hospitals that have achieved excellence in clinical outcomes, patient safety and satisfaction, financial performance and efficiency. What a way to start 2010!

Sincerely,
RANEE BRAYTON
Interim Chief Executive Officer
Northeast Regional Medical Center



Rane Brayton
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