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Los Angeles Vascular Center (LAVC) is happy to announce that it will offer pain relief to patients with chronic pain. It will do so by using spinal cord stimulators. Spinal cord stimulation (SCS) eliminates pain by masking pain signals transmitted by nerves by delivering painless electrical impulses to the spinal cord. The net result of this electrical stimulation is that the masked signals travel to the brain giving the patient has a smooth tingling sensation, called paraesthesia, and this results in a significant reduction of the patient's pain.

SCS is not used in all patients. Before being considered for this technique, patients need to have been refractory to medicines designed to relieve their pain for at least 6 months. Patients can also be considered sooner than 6 months of chronic pain if a surgeon states that either the patient would not benefit from additional surgery designed to relieve the pain or the patient is too unstable to have surgery.

Prospective patients will then have a consultation with Dr. Joseph Hewett to see if they are willing to go ahead with the two step procedure. If they agree, the patient will be sent to a psychologist to see if they can accept the device. If the psychologist states that the patient is ready to receive the device he/she will they be scheduled to have a temporary device placed at LAVC.

Dr. Hewett, under fluoroscopic guidance, will place the electrodes in the patient's spinal canal and adjust the electrical signals delivered to the nerves there. The patient will have this device on for 7 days and will keep a diary of his/her symptoms to see if they are better or worse. If the patient detects improvement the temporary device is removed and an appointment for a permanent device is scheduled 4 weeks later. This delay is needed to allow the spinal cord to heal from the temporary SCS.

The patient then has the permanent SCS placed in a hospital operating-room, as an outpatient, by a neurosurgeon. The power source is similar to that of a pacemaker and needs to be changed in 2-3 years. Once implanted the overwhelming majority of the patients have either no pain or pain that is greatly reduced making their lives more enjoyable.

Dr. Hewett has placed many of these devices in patients in the past and has had extensive training in pain management. He has also been certified as qualified to place SCS devices by Boston Scientific, the manufacturer, after attending a comprehensive training course.

With this effective method to eliminate chronic pain in patients suffering from it, LAVC is taking another step in offering effective and compassionate care of its patients.