

# New Hope for Treating and Beating Depression

Canada is home to one of the first genuinely new treatments for depression in decades.

And psychiatrists from around the world – in Toronto this week for the American Psychiatric Association annual meeting – are talking about it.

Brain stimulation, that is – a promising innovation for treating and beating depression.

Depression is a form of mental illness with powerful psychological effects like other chronic conditions. But depression is also a physical disease which involves both the brain and the body. Using body imaging technology, scientists can actually see depression as it happens.

Depression has organic properties, genetic origins and environmental and social triggers and while it impairs mental functions like mood and concentration, it can also increase the risk of fatal heart attack and suppress our immune system.

There are different kinds of brain stimulation.

One is called deep brain stimulation, a surgical procedure with promise for the very seriously ill. Canadian researchers such as Dr. Sidney Kennedy, Psychiatrist-in-Chief of the University Health Network in Toronto, are leaders in this breakthrough work.

Another treatment is called repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation – or rTMS – an effective, painless, non-invasive form of brain stimulation with no to low side effects, such as a mild headache in occasional cases.

rTMS was licensed four years ago by Health Canada and is being delivered clinically to Canadians by Canadians.

Iain Glass and Salim Dhanani – under the name, Mindcare Centres ([www.mindcarecentres.com](http://www.mindcarecentres.com)) – have opened clinics in Vancouver and Toronto where nearly 400 patients have been treated for depression using technology manufactured for Mindcare by the same company that distributes the heart pacemaker.

For the vast majority of these people, the depression was significantly alleviated or lifted altogether.

Brain stimulation has great promise especially when talk therapy and prescription drugs have limited benefit. And not a moment too soon:

- Depression is the leading cause of disability in Canada and the world. In the U.S., for every two homicides, there are three suicides. Overwhelmingly, depression is the reason.

- Here at home, three million Canadians, including thousands reading this message, suffer from serious depression – yet fewer than one in three seek help.

It doesn't have to be this way. The pain of depression doesn't have to be compounded by the pain of stigma or inadequate and hard-to-access care.

Dr. Allan Young, Associate Director of the Institute for Mental Health at the University of British Columbia says access to new treatments for depression proven to work "are greatly to be welcomed."

Along the same lines, Homewood Health Centre will soon begin evaluating rTMS at its renowned clinical treatment facility in Guelph, Ontario, west of Toronto.

For many illnesses today, there are faster, better treatments than there were 20 years ago.

So, why not for depression?

That's a question Canadians should answer.



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