

Promising new depression treatment

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new, non-invasive treatment for depression that delivers barely perceptible electric currents to the scalp has had promising results in a Sydney trial, and researchers are now looking for participants for a follow up study.

Around half of depressed participants in the trial of transcranial Direct Current Stimulation (DCS) experienced substantial improvements, according to a team of researchers based at the Black Dog Institute and the University of New South Wales (UNSW).

An even larger number enjoyed a clinically meaningful improvement, said study leader, Professor Colleen Loo, from UNSW's School of Psychiatry. The team is now preparing the results for academic publication.

“These are excellent outcomes when you consider that most of these people had [depression](#) that had not responded to other treatments, including medication,” Professor Loo said. “What’s more, further benefits were sustained when we followed people up a month later. That’s an exciting result.”

The trial, the largest of its type in the world, involved stimulating frontal areas of the brain with very small, barely perceptible currents, while patients remained awake and alert. The procedure has no known serious side effects.

“Direct Current Stimulation primes the neurons so that, when they are

triggered, their response is enhanced. This trial is suitable for patients seeking an alternative to medication or who are unable to tolerate anti-depressant drugs or Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)," Professor Loo said.

Studies in the 1960s and 70s reported good results using small electrical currents over a few hours. From 2000, the technique has been further developed, using currents of 1-2 milliamps. Recently, two small overseas studies found promising improvements in depressed patients treated with DCS.

The UNSW researchers are planning another trial to further investigate the optimal way to administer DCS. To begin later this month, the trial is recruiting around 120 people to receive DCS for 20 minutes, five times a week over four to eight weeks. Participants can attend the clinic on an outpatient basis.

More information: Depressed patients aged 18 and over who want to take part in the trial should phone 02 9382 3720 or email TMSandDCS@unsw.edu.au Further information is also available on the Black Dog Institute website www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Provided by University of New South Wales

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