

Matthew J. Bennett

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LSU Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, LA

Casey A. Murphy, M.D.

VA Staff Physician, Pain Management Section; LSUHSC Pain Management Fellowship
Program Director

10-Year Review of Efficacy and Safety of Spinal Cord Stimulators (SCS) in Military Veterans

Objectives: Spinal cord stimulation (SCS) has been shown to be an effective and safe option to treat patients with intractable pain in the general population [1,2]. Our study seeks to confirm that United States military veterans are getting effective and safe treatment similar to their non-veteran peers.

Methods: We reviewed electronic medical records and conducted phone interviews with 65 veterans who had SCS from 2008-2020 at the New Orleans Veterans Affairs Medical Center of New Orleans. Our primary outcome measure was whether veterans would recommend SCS to their peers. We feel that veterans would only recommend SCS if they benefitted from it, and it was safe. Secondary outcome measures were improvements in activities of daily living and ability to decrease opioid pain medications.

Results: 77% of veterans recommended SCS to their peers. Statistical difference was seen in 16 out of 18 categories of activities of daily living (ADL) based on the Pain Outcomes Questionnaire. There were no permanent neurological deficits or deaths as a result of SCS. 2 patients developed skin dehiscence overlying the generator site months post-implant; another developed skin dehiscence overlying the anchor site months post-implant; all were treated with explant, and there were no neurological sequelae. Interestingly, all three of these patients who had explant were eager to get a new SCS implanted as soon as possible because SCS was their most successful treatment.

Conclusion: SCS is effective and safe for veterans in this review at the New Orleans VA Medical Center.