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Studies validate CFS, fibromyalgia

By: E'LOUISE ONDASH - For the North County Times



E'LOUISE ONDASH

Say "chronic fatigue syndrome" and "fibromyalgia," and many physicians just wince. They still don't take the diagnoses seriously, but it's time they did, say researchers at the University of Michigan Health System in Ann Arbor.

Two studies this past year verify that people with chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia, which researchers estimate affects 2 percent to 4 percent of the population, have valid illnesses and need help.

Chronic fatigue syndrome is a debilitating and complex disorder characterized by profound fatigue that is not improved by bed rest and that may be worsened by physical or mental activity.

Fibromyalgia is defined as having a history of widespread pain for at least three months located on each side of the body on six out of 18 "tender points."

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The first study, published November 2006, found "overwhelming data" that chronic fatigue syndrome is real and that its sufferers have a lower pain threshold. The researchers used two types of brain-imaging techniques that indicated that those with fibromyalgia "have abnormalities within their central brain structures" when compared with those without the illness.

Investigators also found that chronic fatigue syndrome is associated with genetic factors that can make some people more likely to develop fibromyalgia.

The second study, published in the Sept. 12 edition of the Journal of Neuroscience, found that the pain of fibromyalgia is difficult to treat because of a "reduced binding ability" of a receptor in the brain that is the target of pain-killing drugs such as morphine. When painkillers can't bind to receptors, they can't alleviate pain as effectively.

Experts will gather in San Diego on Saturday to discuss these issues and others surrounding chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and other chronic illnesses.

"At this point, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration recognize that chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia are real and devastating illnesses," said Dr. **Jacob Teitelbaum**, a board-certified internal medicine specialist who will speak at the conference.

Thirty years ago, Teitelbaum contracted chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia. It was so

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severe that he was unable to work and became homeless during medical school.

He's written about his experiences, as well as some solutions to living with chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia, in "**From Fatigued to Fantastic**" (Avery; \$13.95).

"Things have changed dramatically over the last four or five years," he said. "The CDC spent millions this past year advertising to the public and physicians who need to change their misconceptions. There are still a few nitwits out there who think that there is nothing wrong with you."

More often than not, those with chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia are misdiagnosed ---- sometimes with polio, lupus and multiple sclerosis.

The incidence of chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia "has skyrocketed," Teitelbaum said, but it may be that physicians are finally recognizing it. In general, people who have one illness have both.

"Chronic fatigue syndrome represents an energy crisis: You are spending more than you make," he explained. "You blow a fuse and the area that uses the most energy ---- the muscles ---- malfunction first. It takes more energy to relax muscles than to contract, so when you don't have the energy, the muscles get locked into position and pain is the result. That's fibromyalgia."

Teitelbaum has devised a method for keeping the symptoms under control called the SHIN protocol, which gives attention to sleep, hormonal support, infections and nutritional support. He said that in a placebo-controlled study, about 90 percent of the patients had an improved quality of life using the SHIN protocol.

"Chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia are very treatable," he said. "For the people who have been suffering so long and come to the conference, we will give them the information they need."

"Conquering the Challenge of Chronic Illness" will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at the First United Methodist Church, 2111 Camino del Rio South, Linder Hall Building, San Diego (Mission Valley). The event includes several speakers, vendors, demonstrations, free samples and massages. Cost: \$8 per person; \$12 per couple. Call Janis at (619) 216-9661 or e-mail hope4recovery@cox.net.

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