



Neurology Care Line

PADRECC Pathways

Houston Parkinson's Disease Research, Education and Clinical Center
Neurology Care Line Vol 1, No. 4, Fall 2002

PADRECC Nurses Put Veterans First

Maybe you've heard their voices on the phone or seen them in clinic. If not, we want to introduce you to our PADRECC nurses, Pam Willson, PhD, RN, Certified Family Nurse Practitioner/Assistant Clinical Director of PADRECC and Linda Fincher, RN, PADRECC Nurse Coordinator.

Dr. Pam and Ms. Fincher are your personal advocates and will assist in your healthcare delivery when you see the neurologist, participate in clinical trials, have referrals, testing and surgery or just have questions.

Their nursing approach is holistic, preventative and "biopsychosocial" — encompassing the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects of your health. They are interested in your particular symptoms, how they affect your daily life, what steps you have taken to improve your health status, and what assistance you and your family need.

Your PADRECC nurses are here to help you:

1. Enroll for clinical care.
2. Triage your PD symptoms.
3. Learn about medications, fitness, and nutrition.
4. Prevent weight loss, falls, constipation, stress.

5. Help you problem solve.
6. Prepare for tests, rehabilitation therapies, or surgery.
7. Enroll, assess, and coordinate your clinical research trials.
8. Adjust your Deep Brain Stimulator.
9. Improve the quality of your care and life.

PADRECC Clinic Staff Numbers

Administrative Clerk
Shawn Dowd
713-794-7841
Pam Willson, PhD, RN
713-794-8410
Linda Fincher, RN
713-794-7842

To Prepare for your PADRECC clinic visit, ask yourself the following questions:

- What was my first PD or movement symptom?**
- What year was I first diagnosed?**
- When did I first start taking medication?**
- What was the medication?**
- What makes my symptoms better or worse?**
- What other health problems do I have?**
- What is my MOST worrisome concern?**
- What could we work on to improve my life?**



PADRECC nurses Pam Willson and Linda Fincher

Removing the “Daze” in Holidays

The holidays celebrated between Thanksgiving and the New Year can be both joyful and stressful. Familiar coping strategies may feel less effective and the idea of creating new ways of dealing with events may be overwhelming. Here are some hints that may be helpful.

Acknowledge that the holidays are a nostalgic time for family remembrances. Discussions about former celebrations and deceased family members can make you feel both happy and sad. Expect that your emotions may sometimes overwhelm you.

Flexibility is key to getting through the holidays. This may mean planning a family gathering for brunch rather than a late dinner. Determine the best time of day for you by considering the

medication peak-times, the requirement of physical stamina, the desire to be alone, and the need for rest periods.

Lower your expectations. The house doesn't have to be spotless, the gifts can be simple, and food can be purchased at a cafeteria. “Perfect holidays” are usually found in magazines rather than in our homes.

Give yourself permission to change some traditions and hold on to those you value. Casual gatherings may be more appreciated than formal occasions. Shop from catalogs, buy presents for under \$5.00. Do something different.

If members of your family want to talk about past holidays but their memories are poor, welcome the memories that do re-

main and avoid correcting every detail if the story takes on a new twist.

Create new memories. Do something fun together like organizing a family photo album, making tamales together, or learning new dance steps from your grandchildren. Try to appreciate the beauty of the moment without looking too far back or too far forward.

The purpose of holiday celebrations is being together and feeling loved and welcome. We benefit by cherishing our relationships as we bond with families and friends. Let's take the “daze” out of holidays and make them special so that by the New Year we can look back and say “It was a good year.”

Does DBS affect your memory and thinking skills?

PADRECC is evaluating the long-term outcome of memory and thinking skills after Deep Brain Stimulation for treatment of Parkinson's disease.

Study participants will be asked to come for three 4-hour visits. Participants may be asked to perform paper, pencil, computer, and routine motor tests.

All services, including neuropsychological and motor testing, will be provided and time and travel are compensated.

If you have questions or are interested in participating, please call

Michele K. York, PhD
at 713-794-8939.

Mark Your Calendar! PADRECC Patient/Family Conference

DECEMBER 12

**“Everything You Wanted to Know about
Medications and Memory in Parkinson's
Disease”**

Thursday from 9 AM to 11:45 AM
Houston VA Medical Center
4th floor Auditorium
(near Main elevators)

visit our website

**[www.va.gov/
PADRECC_houston/](http://www.va.gov/PADRECC_houston/)**

Nursing Survey: Golfers Wanted Register as a PADRECC Golf PRO

Physical activity improves cardiovascular and psychological well being and promotes social friendships. We want to know how PD has influenced your game.
Call 713-794-7842 or 713-794-8410

Rehab Corner

Persons with Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders often have difficulty writing because of a tremor, hand weakness, or bradykinesia (which causes the letters to become smaller and smaller). Sometimes the hand tires more quickly than it used to. Here are some suggestions that might help.

1. Vary the size, shape, and weight of your pen. Choose 4 or 5

pens of different shapes, circumferences, and weights. Change pens when your hand gets tired. (This can have the same effect as changing shoes when your feet hurt.) If you have a tremor, ask your occupational therapist to let you try a weighted pen. Otherwise try a lightweight pen.

2. Wrap masking tape around the pen. You can make the circumference any size you want, and the

tape makes the pen easier to grip.

3. Use lined paper.

4. Change the way you grip your pen. Place a "skinny" pen between your index and middle finger and wrap your thumb around the bottom of the pen for more stabilization.

5. Is it easier to write with a fine point? A medium point? Try a roller point, ball point, or felt tip. Decide which one works best.

Two Men with a Vision

The PADRECC functions more smoothly because of the commitment of staff members Shawn Dowd and John Van, young men with the vision that Parkinson's disease will be cured.

The most recognizable phone voice for most PADRECC patients is that of Shawn's. As administrative clerk he is responsible for the enrollment, scheduling, and record keeping of patients and serves as a key communicator in the clinic.

Shawn, a New Orleans native, obtained a degree in broadcast journalism from Louisiana State University, and worked in TV and news production.

"I'm rewarded by my contact with patients and satisfied when they're satisfied. We want to give incredible service," he says.

The staff appreciates Shawn's generosity, joyful disposition, and dedication to veterans.

John, the PADRECC health science specialist, provides updated computer information for

research, clinical and educational projects.

A native Houstonian with a degree in biochemistry from Rice University, John is well-suited to solving technical and scientific problems. When asked what he likes best about his job, John says, "I am energized and excited by

the challenges of each day."

The PADRECC staff appreciates John's unlimited patience and his spirited commitment to excellence.

Shawn and John are two men dedicated to providing the highest standard of care to veterans and their families.



Shawn Dowd (left) and John Van solve a technical challenge

Director's Corner

I want to take the opportunity to update you on our PADRECC activities and share with you some of our 2nd year performance goals. On Thursday, December 12, we will hold a patient – family conference on Parkinson's disease and related movement disorders at the Houston VA Medical Center in the 4th floor auditorium. I will be speaking on medication management, Dr. Pam Willson, RN and Ms. Linda Fincher, RN will discuss nursing issues, and Dr. Michele York, our neuropsychologist, will address memory changes and thought problems. On Friday, February 14, speech-language pathologist, Ms. Teya Miller, will join us to give you suggestions on how to maintain and improve your speech volume and fluency.

As I mentioned in our Summer newsletter, we are pleased to have met all of our first year performance goals, and we are now

looking toward our second year. In addition to expanding and enhancing our clinical programs, we have further developed plans for continuous quality improvement so that we can assure the very best medical care for veterans and continue to comply with all of the policies of the VA and other regulatory agencies.

We are in the process of designing research studies to examine the specific benefits of exercise on PD patients, ways to improve our patients' quality of life, and wellness training techniques. Research projects underway include adult stem cell research, deep brain stimulation, cognitive changes in PD, epidemiology of PD in Harris County, outcome measures in PD, gait-training using supported treadmill ambulation, and new drug trials.

Our planned PADRECC educational programs encompass not only patient/family education but also education of health care professionals in the treatment of PD. We host a weekly seminar

for physicians, researchers, nurses, and allied health professionals, and we are planning a 2-day symposium for allied health professionals in Spring 2003.

For more information on future PADRECC programs and events, check our newsletter and website calendars (www.va.gov/PADRECC_Houston/). I want to extend to all of you my best wishes for the Holiday Season, and I look forward to seeing you on December 12.



*Eugene C. Lai, MD, PhD
Director, Houston PADRECC*

Houston PADRECC Calendar	
12/12/02 9AM-12N	PADRECC Patient/Family Conference Medications; Cognitive Changes in Parkinson's Disease Houston VAMC 4th Floor Auditorium
2/14/03 10AM-12N	PADRECC Patient Family Conference Speech Therapy for Patients with Parkinson's Disease Houston VAMC
3/28/03 8AM—12N	PADRECC Professional Workshop for Nurses and Social Workers Medications; Cognitive Changes; Psychosocial Issues Houston VA Medical Center
6/03 - 6/04	2 - Day Symposium for Allied Health Professional on assessment and treatment of patients with Parkinson's disease and related movement disorders.

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