

Sleep woes may be physical

By JACKIE KLEIN

If you lie awake all night counting spots on the ceiling or you feel like hitting the sack all day, you may have serious problems.

That's the diagnosis, in more informal terms, of Dr. Thomas Roth, a Southfield resident who's director of Hurvford Hospital's recently established Sleep Disorders Center.

"Insomniacs and persons who are drowsy during the day have historically been pains in the neck and struggled off by doctors as neurotic or lazy," Roth said. "But these problems often stem from serious physical disorders which need to be diagnosed and treated."

"The consequences may be serious. Studies have shown that a number of sleep disorders cause accidents, chronic disability, drug abuse and death. If you had a headache for six months, you'd want to know why instead of just getting a pain killer. Insomnia isn't a disease, it's a complaint. It can't be treated with sleeping pills."

In the new center, Dr. Roth and his associates examine, diagnose and treat sleep disorders. Patients may remain at the center for up to three nights. They're monitored with video, audio and polygraph equipment noting vital signs, eye movement, limb movement, airflow and oxygen saturation of the blood.

"FIRST WE take the patient's physical history and then we put them in private rooms an hour before bedtime," Roth said. "We use electrodes to measure brain waves and heart and muscle responses to study how patients sleep at night."

"Some cases are simple. Kids who have trouble breathing at night may have enlarged tonsils or adenoids. But one disorder, sleep apnea, in which the patient actually stops breathing up to several hundred times a night, can—if untreated—lead to sudden death."

Roth and his associates look for physiological rhythm disturbances in patients as they lapse into various phases of sleep. They administer sleeping pills to persons who usually take them and study their effect. Activated brain waves are carefully

studied, Roth said.

Patients go to work or home during the day and come back to the center at night. Persons are controlled by different parts of the brain awake or asleep, Roth pointed out.

Roth lists the major complaints of patients with sleep disorders as insomnia, excessive daytime drowsiness, sleep walking, bed wetting and nightmares. These problems may tie in physical disorders such as rhythmic leg twitching, sleep apnea or drug and alcohol use and abuse.

Narcolepsy, a neurological condition characterized by sudden and uncontrollable attacks of deep sleep, can be recorded at the center, Roth said. It can be dangerous if not treated, he said.

"UNDIAGNOSED, untreated narcoleptics often have car accidents, lose their jobs and even their families," Roth said. "One of the symptoms is loss of muscle control when a victim of the disease is emotionally excited."

"One patient with narcolepsy was diagnosed epileptic and refused to go to his only daughter's wedding because he was afraid he'd have a seizure. His life was crippled until we discovered his real

illness, which is controlled with medication."

It's estimated by the U.S. Public Health Service that more than one third of the country's population suffers from some insomnia, Roth said. About two to 16 per cent, particularly the elderly, turn to sleeping pills, he said.

Abrupt withdrawal from barbiturates usually causes unpleasant side effects, Roth said. He tells some patients to switch from a strong pill to a less-addicting, longer-acting one before they stop taking any medication for sleep.

"Older persons have sleeping problems and they often nod off during the day," Roth said. "But kids have the most troubles. Bed-wetting and night terrors are often physical, not emotional. They could indicate immature nervous systems, especially in boys."

The new Sleep Disorders Center is a regional care facility to diagnose and treat patients with sleep disorders and to do research on the science of drugs, Roth said.



DR. THOMAS ROTH

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