

Western Slope Psychological Services, PLLC
Medical Device Evaluations: Patient FAQs

If your doctor is considering the use of a surgically implanted device to help manage your pain level, you may be referred for a Behavioral Health evaluation. Spinal cord stimulators, peripheral nerve stimulators, intrathecal pain pumps, and intervertebral spacers are all examples of implanted devices for which manufacturers and insurance companies recommend having a professional Behavioral Health screening prior to implantation. The goal of the screening/evaluation is to ensure that the patient has been informed about the procedure, that they do not have any conditions that would rule out the procedure, and that any patient concerns have been addressed.

What will be discussed?

Most of the evaluation will be to discuss your medical history, including the types of treatments and procedures you have had to address your medical issues, and what has and has not helped in the past. Your current living situation and social support system will be discussed, as well as any history of Behavioral Health treatment, significant life traumas, ongoing challenges, substance use issues, and important developmental milestones. General, non-medical questions about your procedure can also be addressed at the evaluation.

My doctor has my medical records; why do I need to go through another screening?

While technology has dramatically expanded the device options available to treat pain, not every patient is a good candidate for a particular technology. Your medical history may be complete regarding the medical interventions you have tried, but it may not be complete in the type of information necessary to determine if you are a good candidate for a proposed device. The most efficient and thorough way to assess a patient for these procedures is for the patient to have a clinical interview with a qualified Behavioral Health specialist.

Do I have to attend therapy or counseling?

No. Your referral to the Behavioral Health department is for an evaluation to determine your fitness for a specific medical device—this is NOT a referral for ongoing treatment. If, in talking with the Psychologist, an issue comes up that might need ongoing treatment, options for treatment and community referrals can be discussed.

I have a [Psychologist/Psychiatrist/Counselor]; do I have to see a specialist at WSPS?

If you are currently in treatment with a mental-health professional in the community, you can sign a release of information form and have your medical provider attempt to contact your counselor/therapist to see if they will perform the device evaluation. In cases where a patient's current counselor would prefer not to perform the evaluation, a patient can be referred to WSPS for a one-time device evaluation without any interruption in their regular therapy.

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I have been/am in Recovery; does this disqualify me for the device procedure?

No. We discuss your history to explore any potential factors that might make a procedure riskier for a patient. There is not one factor that will automatically disqualify a person from receiving a device, but rather all potential factors are examined and considered as a whole. Therefore, it is crucial to be candid and honest about your history and current situation.

Why is my [early childhood/family history/personal history] relevant to the device evaluation?

One way that scientists evaluate risk is to look at large numbers of patients (thousands) and see what kinds of factors they have in common. Simply having a risk factor does not disqualify someone from a procedure. That risk factor will be weighed in consideration of any other factors that apply to that patient.

Will I receive a Behavioral Health diagnosis?

You are being referred to WSPS to determine your fitness for a specific medical device and/or procedure. Any information gathered in the evaluation will be used to address the referring question and will be minimally documented to answer that question. If you are currently experiencing significant mental health symptoms that meet the conditions for a Behavioral Health diagnosis, it will be discussed during the evaluation, and that diagnosis may be added to your medical chart.

Will the information discussed in the evaluation remain confidential?

You have the right of confidentiality during any Behavioral Health session, within the limits set by: 1) laws and regulations, and 2) your medical treatment. For example, a patient who expresses the intent to harm themselves or another, or who reports the exploitation or abuse of a minor, elderly person, or dependent adult may forfeit that confidentiality due to mandated reporting of such issues (laws and regulations). In the case of your medical treatment for chronic pain, the question to answer regards your fitness for a particular device and the procedures associated with it. Any information discussed in the evaluation will be minimally documented to satisfy the requirements of answering that question. Personal details shared in the course of the evaluation would not be recorded in the progress note, which contains only the relevant, minimal clinical data to answer the referring question.

What if I choose not to go through the Behavioral Health evaluation?

It is always your choice whether to follow a treatment recommendation from your doctor. If you decline to participate in a Behavioral Health screening for a specific device, it may limit some treatment choices for your doctor and you. In a case where a patient does not want to undergo the evaluation to determine their fitness for a device, the pain management doctor will be notified, so they and the patient can explore other treatment options not requiring it.