



Customizing headache care for women in Charlotte

Meet “Anne.” Some days, Anne can barely work or hold conversations with her family. Other days, she can’t even get out of bed. Anne is one of more than 39 million Americans who suffer from migraines.

“Migraines and other headache disorders are debilitating conditions that deeply affect quality of life for women like Anne,” said Megan Donnelly, DO.

Donnelly is a neurologist and fellowship-trained headache specialist with Novant Health Neurology and Headache, a new headache specialty clinic that opens this month in SouthPark. The clinic is part of the Novant Health Women’s Center, a beautiful, modern facility that offers a wide range of healthcare services to women.

Novant Health Neurology and Headache brings specialty care to conditions that often resist standard treatment. But even more than that, it brings hope to some who have given up on the idea of living a normal life.

“Improvement in headache control can take someone who has really poor quality of life and give them back their life,” Donnelly said.

Partnering with a specialist

Donnelly values the relationship she has with PCPs, ob-gyns and neurologists, knowing that they are the first line of defense for patients presenting with headaches. She also identifies key factors that can indicate a patient needs a more specialized level of care from a headache specialist:

1. The patient is complex with multiple comorbid conditions
2. The patient has been unsuccessful on at least two migraine medications and the provider feels that he or she has reached an impasse
3. If the patient’s headaches raise red flags — for instance if the headaches wake the patient from sleep or worsen with cough, a position change or sexual activity. This could indicate a more severe condition such as cerebral venous thrombosis, reversible cerebral vasoconstriction syndrome or idiopathic intracranial hypertension.
4. The patient is pregnant and experiencing severe headaches. Nearly 30% of headaches during pregnancy have a secondary cause, such as preeclampsia.

“Migraines happen in women at a 4 to 1 ratio, compared with men. Why? Women face unique issues like menstrual cycles and hormonal changes throughout the life cycle, including puberty, pregnancy and menopause.”

New, advanced treatment for migraine

Dr. Donnelly and her team offer a range of treatments for headache, including:

- Medication management
- Physical therapy
- Neuropsychology/psychotherapy
- Osteopathic manipulation
- Nerve blocks, trigger point injections, Botox



And for acute migraine therapy, there are new, innovative options that came on the market in late 2019, Donnelly said. “The two novel classes of drugs include calcitonin gene-related peptide receptor antagonists (GEPANTS), and 5HT1-F agonists (known as DITANS), which may be great for patients who have had an ineffective response, unpleasant side effects, or contraindications to triptans and NSAIDs.

“My goal,” shared Donnelly, “is to partner with my patient to develop a care plan that reduces the frequency, duration and intensity of the headaches, while helping her feel empowered to change her life.”

Comprehensive care for women, all in one place

Novant Health SouthPark Medical Plaza opens this month at 6324 Fairview Road, Charlotte, NC 28210 and offers a variety of services, including senior health, primary care, pediatrics and dermatology. What’s different with this facility is the dedicated women’s center on the fourth floor. Women now have a convenient, “one-stop-shop” option for health services across all of life’s stages. In addition to Novant Health Neurology and Headache, the center houses women’s focused heart care, a gynecological surgery clinic, as well as obstetrics and gynecology, sexual health and wellness clinic, behavioral health, breastfeeding and breast surgery.

Meet Megan Donnelly, DO



Medical school: Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine

Residency: Neurology,

Cleveland Clinic Foundation

Fellowship: Headache medicine, Cleveland Clinic Foundation

Additional postdoctoral training: Obstetric and lactational neurology, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Magee Women’s Hospital

Dr. Donnelly herself suffers migraines, so she truly understands what her patients are going through.

Novant Health Neurology and Headache opens March 16. To make a referral, call 980-302-8626.

