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Sleep lab comes to Brighton

By Julie Masis

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If you're having trouble sleeping, you can now spend a night with electrodes attached to your head, while your breathing patterns, rapid eye movements and snoring sounds are recorded on videotapes and analyzed by medical professionals — right near your home.

You don't even have to go to the hospital.

Instead, you can make yourself comfortable on the latest technology mattresses in the new Sleep Health Centers sleep laboratory which opened its doors at 1505 Commonwealth Ave. in Brighton in January.

Affiliated with Brigham and Women's Hospital, the new facility features six hotel-like bedrooms with television sets and private bathrooms, as well as memory foam mattresses that adjust to the shape of the sleeper's body.

"It's a wonderful experience. It's kind of like being in a hotel, [with] a nice bed, a TV and videotapes people can watch to explain the procedure," said Lawrence Epstein, the medical director for the Sleep Health Centers company. "It's surprisingly rare that people have trouble falling asleep. It's a relatively comfortable space."

Epstein said one night at the sleep center costs between \$800 and \$1,000, although the stay is covered by most insurance companies.

Sleep lab comes to Brighton (continued)

The Brighton sleep laboratory is an expansion for the Sleep Health Centers company that previously operated an eight-bed sleep study center in Newton. Having closed the Newton office, Sleep Health Centers opened six-bed laboratories in Brighton and Framingham.

According to Epstein, the Brighton lab is staffed by more medical professionals — including psychiatrists, psychologists, neurologists, respiratory professionals, nurses and a dentist — than the previous facility. This allows the Brighton clinic to see about two times more patients during the day, while makes it possible for patients to get their appointments in more quickly.

Christine Shock, public relations representative for Sleep Health Centers, said the center expanded due to a growing interest in sleep medicine.

“I think people are becoming more aware of sleep problems than they used to be. ... It’s now known that sleep disorders can lead to larger problems, [including] high blood pressure and stroke,” she said.

The obesity epidemic has also contributed to the growth of sleep problems. According to Dr. John Winkelman, the medical director for the Brighton facility, a focus in the overnight lab is evaluating people’s breathing during their sleep to diagnose a problem called sleep apnea. Excessive weight can cause a build up of fatty tissue inside the neck, which can constrict the throat and interrupt breathing for short periods of time during the night, Winkelman said. When this happens, people have sleep apnea, which means that they wake up often during the night due to interrupted breathing.

Sleep apnea is most common among middle-aged men, while one of the symptoms of the disease is snoring. While not all people who snore have sleep apnea, all sleep apnea sufferers snore, Epstein said.