

# To the Point

## *Innovative physician-donor ushers in new era of treatment*

Pain physician Chan Gunn, M.D., has been on a crusade for decades. The basis of the crusade? That chronic pain is treatable. Without surgery, without pharmaceuticals, and for a relatively low cost.



“The object of this treatment is to promote the body’s ability to heal,” says Gunn. For Gunn and his trainees, this healing begins with an acupuncture needle.

Approximately 30 years ago, the Workers’ Compensation Board in British Columbia asked Gunn to find out why some people with back pain can return to work while others cannot. He began a close examination of some of the patients in question.

Lesley Koch has been suffering from debilitating pain for about four years; all major muscle groups are affected. With Gunn  
Intramuscular Stimulation, a new treatment

Gunn found that the people with debilitating back pain displayed different physical signs than their counterparts: spots on the skin that were tender, puffy and differently textured, an indication that a tender area or trigger point lay below.

Turning to physiology, Gunn connected these changes to dysfunction in nerve roots that exit from the spine at each level of the spinal column. Such dysfunction may cause a painful condition called myofascial pain syndrome. Using acupuncture needles, Gunn developed a therapy to relieve the pain.

The treatment, Gunn Intramuscular Stimulation (IMS), has been a mainstay in Heather Tick, M.D.'s practice for years. In Gunn IMS, the physician uses a needle to release the trigger points in the affected muscles and in muscles around the spinal column, lengthening them and beginning the healing process. Gunn IMS can treat long-standing myofascial disorders such as back pain, whiplash and repetitive strain injuries, among other conditions.

“I was seeing such incredibly rapid results that I really couldn't expect to see from any other kind of technique,” Tick says of Gunn IMS. “His technique really does enable the body to heal itself from many, many injuries.”

offered at UW Medicine by Heather Tick, M.D., Koch's getting some relief.

Photos: David Wentworth Photography

Gunn, now 81, wants his treatment to find an ever-wider audience. That's the impetus behind the gift he and his wife, Peggy Y. C. Gunn, made to create the Gunn-Loke Endowed Professorship for Integrative Pain Medicine. "I want someone at UW Medicine who can do it," says Gunn.

Tick, a new recruit to the University of Washington and a clinical associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine and the Department of Anesthesiology and Pain Medicine, is the first holder of the professorship. She's excited about the future: bringing new treatment to local patients, and studying the outcomes of Gunn IMS and other integrative approaches to pain with the research experts around her.

"We need other things [non-opiate options] to offer people," says Tick. "It's wonderful that the pain clinic has opened their direction to integrative medicine, and they're truly embracing it."