



Dr.'s needles stick it to chronic pain

ELIZABETH JAMES / SPECIAL TO THE NORTH SHORE NEWS
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"The majority of pain patients recover quickly from their injuries-others, after months of persistent pain, become frustrated when medications and therapies do not result in lasting relief. The persistent discomfort of chronic pain can bring an individual to their emotional limit."

Dr. Chan Gunn, OBC, OC

SOMETIMES relief can come from unexpected places.

My first encounter with Dr. Chan Gunn's approach to the treatment of pain came when I saw David Ingram - of Centa Tax Services fame - interviewed on community television about intramuscular stimulation treatments he'd received for his lower-back and leg pain.

Ingram had undergone the therapy at the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Pain (iSTOP), a nonprofit organization founded by Gunn in 1994 whose clinical mission is to "foster the education of physicians, physiotherapists, nurses and other healthcare professionals in the early diagnosis and treatment of soft tissue disorders."

Intrigued, I heard Ingram explain what is best described in lay terms as a cousin of acupuncture called dry-needling.

Unlike that traditional form of Chinese therapy, the needles used for IMS are applied along well-defined nerve pathways in order to relieve specific muscular pain caused by what we call "pinched nerves" and a variety of other physical problems.

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As Gunn told me last Friday, "It is not the nerves themselves that are sick; the pain they transmit is meant to alert us to something that is wrong elsewhere - often in the muscles or the structure of the body.

"With a combination of laser treatment and the needling, we are able to treat those conditions and the nerve no longer needs to transmit their painful messages."

One of the reasons for my interest was that a family friend - "Elaine" - had been suffering excruciating sciatic pain for some months with little relief to be found despite the best efforts of her doctor.

Following a discouraging visit to a neurosurgeon, Elaine was, indeed, at her "emotional limit." So when she was told a surgical procedure that would fuse two or more of her vertebrae was her best - if not only - option, it didn't help matters that she felt she was not being given enough information about the long-term implications.

Excited at what I was hearing from Ingram, I relayed the information and was met with an equally enthusiastic reply: "Yes! I read about IMS in today's paper."

So, in the belief that IMS was worth a try, Elaine went to see Deirdre Byrne, a physiotherapist trained in the technique by Dr. Gunn.

The results were startling. Improvement was immediate and, by the end of two months, you would never have known she'd suffered from sciatica.

Although Ingram has since succumbed to cancer, he was equally pleased with IMS results.

Little did I know in 2005/2006 how significant IMS would be for me when I spent most of 2010 trying to shake my own lower-backpain experience.

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shape - in more ways than one - body. So when my moaning and complaining strained Elaine's patience, she said: "Either make an appointment with Deirdre, or stop asking me for advice."

Why I'd waited so long I don't know because, after only two or three sessions under what others have called "Deirdre's magic hands," I wanted to skip out of her office, exhilarated by the freedom to move freely again.

When I mentioned that reaction at the next appointment, Byrne said IMS releases endorphins - a type of hormone - to the brain and nervous system where they have a natural pain-killing effect.

When I reviewed that reaction with Byrne last Friday, she explained in her soft Irish accent: "IMS is a way of sculpting good postures out of the poor ones that lead to so many of these conditions."

It makes sense, therefore, that as she pointed out "a good posture helps to create a more optimal muscle balance."

And when I asked how a person can acquire the muscle strength required to support a good posture when workouts just result in more sciatica, Byrne suggested I explore Pilates as an alternative way of exercising.

So watch out all you Pilates aficionados; your world is about to be upended.

In the meantime, if any of you are interested in exploring IMS for what ails you, or as an adjunct to your sports fitness routine, this is by no means a new or untried treatment.

Practised by Dr. Don McKenzie, professor and director of the Department of Sports Medicine at the University of British Columbia, it also has the blessing of the International Olympic Committee.

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varying backgrounds who practise on the North Shore.

Could Dr. Gunn have predicted in 1994 just how successful his unique blend of Western and traditional Chinese medicine would prove to be in the 21st Century?

Maybe not, but the practitioners and patients he and his star pupil have trained and treated for nearly two decades now stand - yes, stand - as testament to their skills.

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