

Natural healing



THE DOCTOR GAME

W. GIFFORD-JONES M.D.

Have you ever had to crawl on your hands and knees because of severe back pain? It's not a dignified position. But it recently happened to me. What caused this problem and how did I finally get relief?

We all love our mothers and I dearly loved mine. But unfortunately she had scoliosis of the spine and passed this genetic problem along to me. Then in my final year at The Harvard Medical School I awakened one morning with the worst headache of my life. A lumbar puncture revealed poliomyelitis.

Scoliosis and poliomyelitis is not a good combination to maintain a healthy spine. As a result over the years I've suffered from occasional attacks of sciatica, usually appearing for no apparent reason.

But I have followed my own advice over the years making sure that I had sufficient intake of calcium and vitamin D to help decrease the risk of osteoporosis. However, it's not possible to eliminate the wear-and-tear effects of aging on the spine.

Several mornings ago I decided it was time to get out of bed. This was a terrible mistake and my luck ran out. Standing up immediately triggered a pain from Hell, the likes

of which I'd never had before. It required my being admitted on a stretcher to the Toronto Western Hospital.

On such occasions doctors get a taste of what it's like to be a patient. I could have killed the x-ray technician who was annoyed at my inability to keep still on a hard slab while x-rays were being taken. Why couldn't he understand that I was in excruciating pain?

An MRI revealed two ruptured disks and spinal stenosis. Finally someone knew I had genuine pain and wasn't a drug addict looking for a morphine fix.

One of Toronto's top neurosurgeons gave me the bad news. Surgery offered only a 70 percent chance of relieving the pain, but a 30 percent chance of making it worse.

Sir William Osler once remarked it's only a doctor who has suffered from a disease who truly understands the problem. He's right. Crawling on your hands and knees provides great insight about how one's life has changed. Moreover, being on the cutting end of a scalpel always makes a surgeon cringe. He knows all the things that can go right, but also those that can go wrong.

A long sleepless night gave me time to weigh my options. I finally decided that since the odds were worse than gambling in Las Vegas, I'd go home hoping time would heal me.

At this low point I remembered a column I'd written about Low

Intensity Laser Therapy (LILT). This treatment had eased the pain of patients who were suffering from a number of acute and chronic painful conditions.

So I called Dr. Kahn, founder of Meditech, in Toronto. Since I could not walk Dr. Denis Potosky, a Russian orthopedic surgeon, now working as a therapist with Dr. Kahn (another reason why we're short of doctors), treated me with LILT at my home for several days. The first few treatments provided no significant relief. But within a week I was able to drive to the clinic and four weeks later I was once again pain free in my office.

Researching and writing an article about LILT is one thing. Being a grateful patient who'd been spared a major surgical operation prompted further inquiry. At this point I'd also become a very curious patient, wondering how light therapy could result in such a dramatic relief of pain.

Studies at the University of London, England and other research centers show that it's important to decrease the duration of acute inflammation. This results in less scar tissue and chronic pain. LILT accomplishes this by giving a jump-start to the body's natural healing process. It delivers energy to the muscles and joints that's transformed into biochemical energy. The result is increased blood supply to the injured area, decreased swelling and accelerated healing time.

This treatment is not available in all parts of the country. For more information call the toll-free number 1-888-557-4004.