

LASE Procedure Offers Pain Relief

By Jennifer T. Kollar, Doctors Pain Clinic

Joseph Pazillo of Girard knows how debilitating chronic back pain can be. Pazillo woke up one morning and was unable to get out of the bed. "I literally had to crawl on my hands and knees because I couldn't stand up," he explains.

Pazillo's pain prompted him to schedule a trip to his family doctor and a chiropractor. He was diagnosed with two protruding discs and with pain radiating down his left leg.

After several traditional and conservative therapies failed, Pazillo's doctor referred him to Dr. Tracy L. Neuendorf, medical director of the Pain Management Center at St. Joseph Health Center in Warren. Dr. Neuendorf is board certified in pain management and anesthesiology.

"Dr. Neuendorf first tried a series of three epidurals hoping I would get relief from the pain. The first epidural worked for about six months but the next two epidurals didn't help and I was still in a lot of pain," explains Pazillo. However, Pazillo wasn't discouraged for long, especially after Dr. Neuendorf explained that he might be a candidate for the LASE (Laser Assisted Spinal Endoscopy) procedure.

WHY CONSIDER LASE?

- **Four out of five patients benefit-based on patient assessment**
- **Shorter recovery time**
- **Minimally invasive outpatient procedure**
- **Low patient risk –little or no skin scar with low morbidity**
- **Cost effective/most insurances cover the procedure**
- **Does not compromise surgical alternatives**

The LASE incorporates the use of a miniature endoscope with a fiber-optic laser which is inserted into the disc. The incision through the skin is less than a quarter-inch. The LASE endoscope allows Dr. Neuendorf to view the bulging nucleus tissue and remove it with the laser fiber. By removing some of the nucleus from the disc, the pressure on the nerve root is reduced or eliminated along with the pain.

"Patients must be carefully selected for the LASE procedure. Not all patients with herniated discs are candidates for the procedure. Sometimes a patient needs surgery for their herniated disc and this procedure will not help those patients," explains Dr. Neuendorf.



Thanks to Dr. Neuendorf (right) and the LASE procedure, Joseph Pazillo can now concentrate on his golf swing without pain.

A Helping Hand

According to Dr. Neuendorf, patients diagnosed with contained herniated discs with radiculopathy are the best candidates for the LASE procedure. "In a contained herniated disc, the nucleus pushes against the annulus causing it to bulge and press against the nerve and thus causing pain. The LASE technique is designed to decompress and reduce the bulging nucleus enough to eliminate the pressure it is placing on the nerve," explains Dr. Neuendorf.

A LASE procedure is normally performed in an outpatient setting and typically takes from one to two hours to complete. Local anesthesia is administered and the patient is conscious during the procedure. "The procedure has 85-90 percent success rates and has a less than one percent complication rate," states Dr. Neuendorf.

Most LASE patients return to their daily activities within a matter of days and for some patients noticeable improvement may occur as early as 24-48 hours. Leg pain is usually the first to improve.

After having the LASE performed, Pazillo experienced enough pain relief that he was able to become active again. However, he was still far from being pain-free. He had to undergo a second LASE procedure for his second herniated disc. After having the second LASE performed, Pazillo was able to play a full 18 holes of golf and walk over a mile each day on his treadmill.

For more information about the LASE Procedure, please call 330.629.2888 or 330.841.4032.

TREATING UPPER EXTREMITY INJURIES

For patients suffering from hand injuries, an occupational therapist specializing in hand therapy can give their recovery a real boost. Humility of Mary Health Partners' occupational therapist Jonathan Queen recently earned the designation of Certified Hand Therapist (CHT), the highest professional credential in the specialty of upper extremity rehabilitation.

To obtain CHT status, Queen completed a minimum of five years clinical experience, including 2,000 plus hours in direct hand therapy practice. In addition, he successfully passed a comprehensive test of advanced clinical skills and theory in upper extremity rehabilitation. By obtaining these voluntary credentials, Queen now becomes part of an elite group of occupational and physical therapists who have met the standards set by experts in hand therapy.

"Anyone with an injury wants nothing but the very best to assure maximum recovery," said Michael Ruffing, occupational therapy manager for Humility of Mary Health Partners. "Jonathan's designation offers the public assurance that the therapist treating them has achieved the highest level of competency in the profession. We are very proud of this achievement and hope to use this as a springboard to further develop our outpatient hand therapy program as we continue our commitment to providing the best possible health care to the residents of the Mahoning Valley."

Queen is a 1993 graduate of Youngstown State University and a 1999 graduate of Arizona School of Health Science. He specializes in the evaluation and treatment of neurologic and orthopedic disorders of the hand and upper extremities.

