

Nov 6, 2000

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

Maui

Photonic Stimulation

Relatively new treatment helps ease area man's leg pain



By Joe Crocetta/Staff Photographer

Ron Beeler of Waynesboro, Pa., says photonic stimulation helped ease his leg pain. In the procedure, a stimulator emits infrared light that penetrates the skin to prompt increased blood flow and circulation.

"I think it's a great field if it works or continues to work on a good percentage of people. Who's to knock it? I think there's a true avenue of alternative medicine that's out there and works."

— Myron Bernstein,
Waynesboro podiatrist

By KEVIN CLAPP
Staff Writer

The pain was unbearable, but then Ron Beeler saw the light and it went away.

His is not the story of a spiritual journey, though Beeler is a praying man and prayer has been a constant in his life.

No, this is about an ankle he twisted working at Antrim House Family Restaurant in Hagerstown on Easter Sunday, 1997, and the development of often crippling pain in his right leg.

Countless visits to multiple doctors, splints, casts, MRIs, CAT scans and bone scans yielded nothing — at one point he was told the problem was in his head — but he says a referral to a chiropractor outside Pittsburgh solved the problem and eased his pain.

"It's almost like you're sitting in front of a heater or standing in front of a fire and it burns, only you can't get away from it," Beeler, 58, says of the pain.

At times, the Waynesboro, Pa., man's leg would feel fine. Then there were the shopping trips punctuated by half-hour stops to sit and rest.

Enter Constance Hayber, a chiropractor in Monroeville, Pa.

Using a device called a Photonic Stimulator — approved for use in 1998 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration — Hayber treated Beeler's injury and made his life comfortable again. The stimulator emits infrared light that penetrates the skin to prompt increased blood flow and circulation.

Developed by Hayber and marketed by Bales Scientific of Walnut Creek, Calif., it is touted on the company's Web site as a way to provide "safe, temporary relief of minor aches and pains where heat is indicated."

"From what I've looked at and read, it's had a very good response, but nothing is 100 percent," says Myron Bernstein, the Waynesboro podiatrist who referred Beeler to Hayber.

"I said to Ron, 'I don't know if this thing really works.' He came back about one week later a changed individual," Bernstein recalls. "His pain disappeared, he started walking more normally and here it is almost a year later and he's reversed his symptoms. I'm amazed by it."

Before the photonic treatment, Bernstein says Beeler, who also works at the newly-opened IHOP in Hagerstown, was bound for an operating table. His patient's success story has piqued Bernstein's interest in the technology.

"I think it's a great field if it works or continues to

work on a good percentage of people," he says. "Who's to knock it? I think there's a true avenue of alternative medicine that's out there and works."

Hagerstown chiropractor Marc Gamerman says he hasn't heard much about Hayber's specific treatment, but is aware of using infrared light, hot and cold pads, or ultrasound to treat injuries. As for Hayber's methods, he said they don't sound mainstream.

"It may very well work. There might be a lot of stuff we can't quantify that does work very well," Gamerman says. "If it works for this guy, great."

The cost

Among the debits to using photon treatment is its cost; Hayber says one thermal image costs \$75, and that each session will likely include multiple images. Photon treatment is \$31, plus \$50 for the office visit. Still, Hayber says it works as an alternative to invasive procedures.

"It does not give any type of a shock or a burn or an ouch," Hayber says. "My passion is a war against pain in a nondrug manner. ... Hopefully, this type of treatment can help people, if not get off of medication completely, at least reduce it."

The technology is not a cure-all. Late last spring, the pain in Beeler's leg began to flare up; by August it reached a point where he needed to return to Hayber's office for four follow-up treatments.

Other than an occasional dull ache or burning sensation in his leg, his problem has again disappeared. Despite his return visit, Beeler remains sold on Hayber and the photonic treatment.

"It's unbelievable. I had some burning, but when I left her office. ... I felt like a different person," he says. "It was amazing, and until you go through it, you can't explain to anybody what it's like."

Besides his thanks and appreciation for all that Hayber, Bernstein and other doctors did to help him, Beeler says he made it through his ordeal because of his tight-knit family and the thoughts and prayers of members of his church, Calvary Assembly of God in Waynesboro.

Initially skeptical of photon treatment, Beeler says he went to see Hayber because he didn't have anything to lose but a trip to Pittsburgh and the cost of a hotel. He also fully expects he'll need to see Hayber again, and will do so without reservations.

"If I have to go back, I won't hesitate because it's helped me," Beeler says. "If it turns out it doesn't help, I know I've tried and I've done my best."