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MIREaculous

MIRE treatment, or Anodyne therapy, proving successful in counteracting neuropathy

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By Vickie Snow
Staff writer

When a truck backed over her toe, Marilyn Benson didn't feel it at all.

She also didn't realize a needle was lodged in her foot for three months until she saw blood on the carpet.

A sewing teacher, Benson was used to not feeling sewing needles pricking her fingers. She sewed Velcro closures on her clothing because doing buttons was impossible; she looked for pants with elastic waistbands because a regular waistband felt like a dagger in her spine.

Benson has neuropathy, a nerve disorder that can stem from diabetes, injury or surgery — or arise out of the blue, as in Benson's case — and cause shooting pain. It can erase all feeling from fingers down to toes and turn them cold as ice and discolored.

"Neuropathy is a hideous condition," Benson said. "If somebody tried hugging me, I'd be in tears because the pain was so excruciating. Elevators are a nightmare. I have to stand in the corner or I'll fall on the floor."

You know that Novocain-induced rubbery feeling at the dentist? Multiply it by dozens, or hundreds. Imagine how difficult everyday tasks such as cooking, walking, working or driving would be if you could not feel your hands or feet.

"Imagine your feet being cut off and walking with just stubs," said Russell Dowding of Tinley Park. "That's how it felt. I couldn't feel the gas or brake pedals anymore."

Dowding was diagnosed with diabetes five years ago and has numbness from his feet to knees.

Benson and Dowding finally have found a fix.

They reported dramatic improvement within the second week of treatment with monochromatic infrared energy, or MIRE, a relatively nontraditional modality also referred to by its manufacturer name of Anodyne therapy.

"When I got off that table, I could feel my feet hit the floor," Benson said. "In 10 years I haven't felt that. It was an epiphany. My friend and I just cried!"

In a short time, MIRE treatment allowed her to do things she'd been unable to do for years.

"I threaded a needle this week, and I can't tell you the last time I could do that," she said. "I can feel my shoes when I put them on. I can feel my pants against my legs."

Benson was misdiagnosed with multiple sclerosis and spent a decade seeing specialist after specialist for a total lack of sensation and horrible pain in her feet, legs, back and hands. Two years ago, Rush University Medical Center in Chicago correctly diagnosed her with peripheral neuropathy and suggested a visit to

Mayo Clinic. She went, suffered through a week of tests and was told there was nothing to help her except taking medication.

With MIRE, Benson, who also has vertigo and uses a cane, finally seems on the right track. No more falling down or knocking people over on escalators.

"I've been given my life back," Benson said. "I think this is a miracle. It is the first thing that's given me hope."

MIRE, the "miracle," as many patients and practitioners are calling it, stimulates circulation and improves sensation, leading to better walking and balance.

"No other modality in physical therapy will reverse sensation," said Benson's physical therapist, Mohamed Hassan, co-owner of Premier Physical Therapy in Orland Park, Evergreen Park and Hinsdale.

MIRE also decreases pain, which in turn can allow a reduction in medication.

MIRE can soften scar tissue, relieve inflammation and promote healing. MIRE also is used to treat persistent wounds or diabetic ulcers.

It was approved for manufacturer Anodyne Therapeutics by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 1994.

The treatment is available at Premier, Palos Community Hospital, where Dowding is treated, and 80-some other Anodyne Neuropathy Care Centers in Illinois, including Bridgeview, Chicago, Frankfort, Homewood, Homer Glen, Joliet and Willowbrook.

Premier and Palos Community Hospital report an 85 percent success rate in using MIRE.

"Clinically, I cannot believe the difference it's made in some of my patients," said hospital physical therapist Jan Skwarczyk. "We've seen people not needing to use a wheelchair or cane anymore. I'm not someone who's easily swayed to try something new. After the results I saw, it was almost miraculous."

The painless treatment involves credit card-sized pads placed directly on the skin wherever a nerve malfunction exists. The

patient may feel a warm, relaxing sensation while resting for 30 minutes before removing the pads and doing light exercise. Treatment is recommended three times a week and can make a difference in one week or more.

The science behind MIRE is based on infrared energy releasing naturally occurring nitric oxide from hemoglobin to dilate blood vessels and improve circulation.

MIRE is still a relatively unknown treatment, which can cost \$50 to about \$300, depending on the duration of each session and whether it's accompanied by physical and massage therapy. Treatment is covered by Medicare and many other major health insurance carriers. Some patients also may be prescribed a MIRE unit at home.

Benson leaves her Gurnee home every Sunday night and stays with her friend in Orland Park through Wednesday while being treated at Premier.

Hassan, a physical therapist for 14 years, formerly with Northwestern Memorial Hospital, opened Premier with Ahmed Hassan (no relation) in 2000. They've specialized in MIRE since 2002 and treated nearly 1,000 patients.

"Our philosophy is to use the most recent technology for pain management and rehabilitation," said Mohamed Hassan, who has a master's degree in health science.

Another Premier patient, Joanna Huscher, 61, a Chicago Heights resident diagnosed with diabetes six years ago, also noticed improvement in sensation and balance the second week into treatment.

"It's helped me tremendously," Huscher said. "I used to have to hold on to the treadmill because I had no balance. Now I don't have to. I can walk without going from side to side like I'm drunk."

The physical therapy department at Palos Community Hospital has treated nearly 100 patients with neuropathy or diabetic ulcers since acquiring a MIRE machine in November.

"We've seen absolutely fabulous results in wound care," Skwarczyk said. "And it's also one of the only things that can help

diabetic peripheral neuropathy."

One of her patients, Dan Roe of Oak Forest, a diabetic for 20 years, stopped working 10 years ago when the neuropathy got too painful. Then he had a wound on the bottom of his foot that wouldn't heal for months. MIRE cured it.

"I was very surprised," Roe, 45, said. "And I've gotten a little sensation back in my leg."

Just last year, Benson said, "I figured I was getting so bad that we had better do things before I end up in a wheelchair permanently."

She worked on floats for last year's Rose Parade.

"I thought that was going to be my last hurrah," Benson said. "Now, I have more plans than you can imagine."

She's looking forward to the family's annual visit to Hilton Head Island, S.C.

"This year, I know I'm going to be able to walk that beach," she said.

For more information

● **Premier Physical Therapy:** (708) 460-8080 in Orland Park; (708) 423-7900 in Evergreen Park; (630) 230-0303 in Hinsdale.

● **Palos Community Hospital:** Physical Therapy Department at (708) 923-5050.

● **Anodyne Therapy System:** Find one of 80 Anodyne Neuropathy Care Centers in Illinois by calling (800) 521-6664 or visiting www.anodynetherapy.com.

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