Alternative Care Providers

by MARLENE WALLACE

Chronic Pain and Alternative Health Care Providers

I am a retired health care professional who has suffered from osteoarthritis-related lower back and neck pain for many years. As a chronic pain sufferer, I can honestly say that my alternative health care providers are my “life savers”!

Often, people who have acute or chronic pain rely mainly on their family doctors for treatment. Invariably, traditional “old school” family doctors will recommend OTC pain relievers for mild to moderate pain or prescription drugs for more severe pain and not much else.

While the above treatment methods are certainly a good place to start, the vast majority of prescription pain medications are highly addictive and should not be used on a long-term basis. There are many other “alternative” medical options that are extremely effective at pain management and they do not involve drugs of any kind.

Thankfully, my GP has always been very open to using natural treatment options and I have learned to embrace them over the years. My personal chronic pain management “team” includes a chiropractor, a registered massage therapist (RMT) and a licensed acupuncturist.

Every month, I routinely schedule appointments with all three. Sometimes, I need to go more frequently if I have a “flare-up” of my back or neck that’s caused by strain or overuse. During a flare-up, the muscles in my back and/or neck become particularly inflamed and the associated pain becomes more severe than usual.

My Chiropractor

After my initial neck/back injury, the first alternate provider I went to was the chiropractor who shared an office with my family doctor. I am a firm believer in routine chiropractic adjustments in order to realign the spinal column by releasing what are known as “subluxations”. They occur “when one or more of the bones of your spine (vertebrae) move out of position and create pressure on, or irritate spinal nerves” (echiropractic.net).

Some people are sceptical or afraid of having a chiropractor adjust their neck. The reason is that a very small percentage of individuals have suffered strokes after having neck adjustments. However, chiropractors maintain that neck adjustments are very safe.

Sometimes, the vertebrae in my neck become “locked”. When this happens, I get pressure headaches that feel like my temples are inside a vice that is being tightened. The only thing that seems to help is having my neck “cracked” and I experience relief almost instantaneously. I really rely on my chiropractor to help me manage my pain!

My Massage Therapist

Eventually, my chiropractor moved to another office which he shares with several RMTs. Shortly after that, I started having monthly massages to help relax my back/neck muscles.

First, I have a 30 minute massage. Then, I have my chiropractic adjustment immediately afterwards. If your muscles are especially tense, they can pull on the associated joints. This pulling action can cause the joints to become misaligned. My neck muscles seem to become quite tense and painful in between appointments. So, my chiropractor finds it adjusts much easier if my neck muscles are relaxed by being massaged first.

My Acupuncturist:

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese “holistic” medical practice that has become very popular today. Based on treating all bodily systems, acupuncture involves inserting thin, sterile, disposable needles into specific “acupoints”. It has been proven to relieve symptoms of many ailments including migraines, fibromyalgia, anxiety, depression, stress as well as chronic pain associated with osteoarthritis.

My acupuncturist is actually the daughter of my next door neighbors. I have known her since she was a small child. When she first started to study acupuncture, I willingly became one of her “guinea pigs”. She had to practice on subjects before receiving her registration certificate. Ten years later, I still see her every month and find my acupuncture sessions very helpful in my chronic pain management plan.

None of my alternative medical treatments are covered by our government medical plan. Chiropractic is the only one that is covered by my private medical insurance. However, the pain relief I gain from all three is “priceless”!