

PHYSIATRY (fizz ee at' tree) Treats the Whole Person

WHAT IT IS Physiatry is a branch of medicine that began in the 1930s. It treats conditions that limit a person's ability to function, involving the bones, muscles, joints, brain, and nervous system. Physiatry is unique among medical fields, because it deals with the whole person rather than focusing on a specific body system or merely treating symptoms. It addresses the physical, emotional, and social needs of the patient.

The goal of physiatry is to provide medical care to those who have pain, weakness, numbness, and loss of function, so they can maximize their full physical, psychological, social, and vocational potential. Doctors who practice physiatry are called physiatrists.

HOW IT WORKS To make an accurate diagnosis, physiatrists use various techniques, including detailed medical history and all types of spinal imaging (x-ray, CT myelogram, MRI, bone scan). Physiatrists also perform specialized nerve tests (electrodiagnostics commonly called EMG) to help assess the location and severity of possible nerve damage. Following diagnosis, a physiatrist can employ a range of non-surgical types of intervention for pain and spasm relief, as well as for rehabilitative care. Procedures include spinal injections, BOTOX® injections, steroids/anesthetics applied locally, and needling techniques.

Rehabilitation focuses on the restoration of a diseased or disabled patient, returning them to optimal physical, psychological, and social functioning. Physiatrists treat patients with:

- Low Back Pain
- Neck/Cervical Pain
- Sports/Work-related Injuries
- Stroke Rehabilitation
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Chronic Pain
- Traumatic Brain Injury/Concussion
- Amputations
- Cancer Pain
- Neuropathic Pain
- Osteoarthritis/Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Repetitive Stress Disorders
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Tendonitis

HEALING CLAIMS Since the advent of physiatry, people have improved from conditions that once were considered permanently debilitating or fatal. Physiatry serves all ages and treats problems that touch upon all of the major body systems.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTS *Dr. Mechel Henry, a board-certified Physiatrist with Bay Area Orthopaedic Sports and Spine, reveals case studies regarding two of her recent patients. Dr. Henry is also an avid triathlete.*

At age 60, Mary had fallen and broken her hip. She had weak bones, a condition also known as osteoporosis. Her hip required surgery, after which she was unable to work, because she experienced pain and was weak.

Mary lived alone and had many stairs to climb. As a result, she fell again, re-fracturing her hip. This fall required yet another hip surgery. In addition, Mary's right hand began going numb and after an MRI, she was told that she needed a neck operation immediately.

Mary consulted with Dr. Henry for a second opinion and reevaluation of her MRI showed cervical stenosis, or tightness in the neck area, but no neurological deficits. Dr. Henry also performed electrodiagnostic testing, and discovered that Mary had carpal tunnel syndrome, a condition whereby the median nerve of the arm is compressed at the wrist, which caused the numbness in Mary's right hand.

Dr. Henry treated Mary with a simple injection of steroids in the carpal tunnel and her pain and numbness went away. Since Mary had not exercised in a while, Dr. Henry started her in water therapy where Mary gained confidence and strength. Recently, Dr. Henry received a letter from Mary stating, "Thank you for giving me my life back." Mary has since returned to work and always insists that there is a pool wherever she travels.

Another patient, Jean, a 27-year-old nationally-ranked professional triathlete, had unresolved leg pain for which she had seen multiple specialists. She was depressed and scared about her future because she experienced severe pain and could not exercise or compete. The reality was that Jean's sponsorship money was becoming hard to maintain because of her injury.

Dr. Henry evaluated Jean's physical problems and ran additional tests. After developing a relationship, Dr. Henry and Jean decided it was time to test the pain. Jean had a few setbacks but within months she had completed several 100-mile bike rides with very little pain.

Dr. Henry encouraged Jean to race again. After winning 1st place in a major triathlon, Jean is back on track and her pain is almost gone. Dr. Henry has taught Jean several valuable techniques to prevent overuse injuries and burn out, including:

- Proper administration of medication during rehabilitation helps to ease discomfort
- Injury prevention requires constant vigilance
- It is best to address pain early on
- Rehabilitation is more effective when the patient maintains a positive outlook.

Dr. Henry loves seeing her patients at races—even if they do end up beating her!