

Amazing Pain Relief

Spinal cord stimulation decreases pain, increases mobility and allows patients to enjoy their lives again.

When Tony Pandolfi says he's feeling better, he's not exaggerating. "There was a point in my recovery when I was walking like an 'L,' like the letter L," he says. "That's how hunched over I was."

A former commercial diver, Tony suffered from debilitating back pain for more than ten years and tried numerous treatments, including back surgery, to alleviate the discomfort. Following his surgery, however, the pain worsened rather than improved, and he says he developed chronic lower back pain on both the right and left sides.

"I could hardly do anything," he recalls. "I couldn't dive anymore. I couldn't walk. I couldn't sit. I couldn't lie down. Just the normal stuff, I couldn't do."

In fact, for two years in a row, when his daughter, who lives in California, traveled to Atlanta in the summer, Tony wasn't able to travel north and spend time with her. "I couldn't even sit for six hours to drive," he says.

One of the most excruciating developments, he shares, was when the pain attacked his central nervous system, causing him to drop from 220 pounds down to a weight of 158 pounds. "My medical doctor was very concerned about that."

A major turnaround

Thankfully for Tony, he sought the care of the physicians at Advanced Pain Management in Port Orange. When Amit Sharma, MD, joined the practice in 2009, Tony had been a patient for about six months. "At that point, Mr. Pandolfi had probably tried almost every kind of pain medication you can imagine," the doctor explains. "He also tried many different treatment options, including physical therapy, chiropractic treatment, and massage, and none of them had been helpful."

It's important to note, Dr. Sharma says, that Tony's situation is not unusual, adding that he considers back pain one of the leading causes of disability in America. "I would say that probably one in five Americans has suffered from back pain at

some point in his or her life. And chronic back pain causes not only physical problems but also financial deficits in the form of sick days and job loss."

Because back pain can occur for many different reasons, identifying the problem can take some time. As frustrating as the diagnostic process was, Tony says his doctors at Advanced Pain Management had "the patience of saints. With the medical system, you have certain steps you have to take before you can get to the biggie."

immediately and, Dr. Sharma shares, the improvement continued. "After implantation, he could walk. He used to come into our clinic using a walker or a cane. But after the procedure, he actually came in walking without any support.

"He's a very remarkable case and he's



Tony Pandolfi

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To make sure patients are completely informed, Dr. Sharma notes that, before treatment begins, there are at least two or three educational sessions in which patients are walked through the process. "We explain the risks and benefits to them," he says. "If they want, we can even arrange face-to-face meetings with other patients who have gone through the treatment. This is a unique service we provide to help them feel really comfortable.

"Even before the first step of the procedure happens," the doctor confirms, "the patient can actually teach you what he is going to go through."

"A productive, active life"

Six weeks after the implantation of his spinal cord stimulator, Tony is very optimistic about the next phase of his life. Now able to walk and sit comfortably, and even sleep through the night, he's feeling great. "Soon, I'll start rehab and I expect to lead a productive, active life and go swimming again," he says. "By this summer, I'll be back in the water."

And thanks to a little gadget he refers to as his "best friend," the mechanism that controls the electrodes in his spine, Tony also expects the pain to stay away permanently. "This little device, about the size of a cell phone, has four different programs of intensity and different types of stimulation. I can regulate it, either more or less.

"It's amazing," he marvels. "Utterly amazing."

Thrilled with the results, Tony is only too happy to share his experiences. "I've already recommended Advanced Pain Management to four different people, and they've all told me they made appointments to go there.

"There's just no pain anymore, and I had chronic, unbelievable back pain," he says. "I'm well on the road to recovery and I'm extremely happy. I would recommend this treatment and these doctors wholeheartedly to anybody. In a heartbeat." **FHCN**—Brenda Klettke



Kirit Bhalani, MD, completed his education in anesthesiology with specialization in pain management at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

He became director of pain management with Florida Memorial Hospital Systems and Columbia Hospital. Dr. Bhalani is a Diplomate of the American Academy of Pain Management and has been practicing pain management for over 15 years.



Amit Sharma, MD, completed his residency at Columbia University and his fellowship in pain medicine at Johns Hopkins University.

Later, he served as an assistant professor at Columbia University and contributed actively to textbooks and peer-reviewed literature. He has lectured in many conferences, seminars, and grand rounds and has been invited to be a guest speaker at leading universities. Dr. Sharma has expertise in the field of neuromodulation (spinal cord and peripheral stimulators) and disc-related procedures. He is board certified in anesthesiology as well as by the American Board of Pain Medicine.

Those steps, Dr. Sharma notes, revealed that Tony suffered from a combination of neuropathic and arthritic pain. "Neuropathic pain occurs when the nerve pathways to the brain itself are damaged. After we realized that was his condition, we offered him neuromodulation, which is a spinal cord stimulation therapy."

According to the doctor, following a successful four- to five-day trial period to determine the effectiveness of neuromodulation on individual symptoms, a stimulator with an internal battery is permanently implanted under the skin. "In Mr. Pandolfi's case, after the trial period, he came back and basically said he was a changed man. His pain was almost one hundred percent controlled. He was very, very happy."

With such a positive result, Tony underwent the implantation procedure

not the only one. Our clinic is full of these successful cases."

Critical steps

The two principal goals for the physicians at Advanced Pain Management, Dr. Sharma stresses, are exceptional care and patient education. "I was trained at Johns Hopkins," he says, "and the most important thing they taught was that, once you go out on your own, your patient becomes your student. I have always worked on that philosophy."

Tony says he learned firsthand the benefits of such an approach. "Like I said," he explains, "their patience speaks for itself. They took the time to work with me, to diagnose the problem, and to make sure we had a handle on the right situation. I would definitely say they focus on education."

Patient satisfaction matters

Committed to patient education and excellence in health care, the physicians and staff at Advanced Pain Management welcome the opportunity to serve new patients. For information or to make an appointment, call **(386) 671-0600** for any of their three convenient locations: **325 Clyde Morris Blvd., Suite 400**, in Ormond Beach; **900 N. Swallowtail Drive, Suite 102**, in Port Orange; and **9 Pine Cone Drive, Suite 104A**, in Palm Coast.