Body, heal thyself

Non-surgical procedure helps healing process

A fer suffering a painful, torn rotator cuff in his shoulder, Dean Conley, 52, of Mount Vernon, can now lift his arm over his head thanks to a treatment that used platelets from his own blood to heal the damaged area.

Called Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) therapy, the treatment was developed 20 years ago and helps patients accelerate the healing of muscle, bone and other tissues with tendon injuries (tennis elbow and knee tendons), torn ligaments, wounds and osteoarthritis.

Using a simple, non-surgical procedure, PRP therapy uses the body’s own platelets by injecting them into the damaged area, creating natural growth factors to accelerate tissue and wound healing.

Conley couldn’t be happier. His restored movement came as the result of a chance encounter with Sunny Kim, MD, who was his doctor while he was a patient at St. Luke’s Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, a regional leader offering the most comprehensive array of services in eastern Iowa.

Mobility returned

As for Conley, who cares for his aging parents, the treatment has returned his mobility.

“Before the procedure, I couldn’t lift more than one plate at a time out of the cupboard,” said Conley. “Now I can lift four or more without any trouble.”

That’s a huge accomplishment for Conley. Not only did he tear the rotator cuff after trying to pick up his mother with one arm when she fell at home, but in 1982, he lost his left arm in a combine accident.

Later, complications from diabetes led to amputations in both legs that are fitted with prosthetic devices.

“I have almost a full range of motion now,” said Conley. “I am able to work out with hand weights to increase the muscle strength in the shoulder. I’m pretty sure there was such a dramatic change.”

Pausing to reflect on the chain of events that led up to the treatment, he said, “I’m very lucky to have had Dr. Kim assigned to me as my doctor. I was impressed. If I had to do it over again, I’d do it. I urge people to not be afraid to try something different. Sometimes, there’s a better way of doing things.”

Injection therapy speeds healing

As it turns out, Dr. Kim, founder of Progressive Rehabilitation Medicine, P.L.C., which is located at St. Luke’s Hospital, is one of the few doctors in the Midwest trained in PRP therapy. It’s an emerging treatment in an area of regenerative medicine called orthobiologics that merges technology with the body’s natural ability to heal.

Typically patients are those who have not had success with other procedures or are not candidates for surgery. Many of Dr. Kim’s patients travel from surrounding states.

The procedure takes less than an hour. The patient’s blood is taken and placed in a filtration system to separate the platelets. Then the blood is injected directly into and around the injured area.

The platelet release proteins that Dr. Kim calls a powerful “cocktail” of growth factors that help the body repair and heal.

“It’s elegant, clear and simple,” Dr. Kim said. “I have about a 98 percent success rate with the treatment.”

When someone experiences an injury or illness that needs physical rehabilitation, our most important goal is to get patients back to where they want to be. Whether it’s intensive therapy after a stroke, joint replacement surgery or a sports injury, the physical medicine and rehabilitation experts at St. Luke’s provide patients with remarkable care.

“St. Luke’s Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PMR) is a regional leader, offering the most comprehensive array of services in eastern Iowa. We serve patients throughout their physical rehabilitation journey, from inpatient stay to outpatient therapy and follow-up doctor’s appointments. Our skilled staff works with each patient and their family to develop an individualized treatment plan.”

He even got his Boston Terrier, Rambo, to run errands up and down the stairs at home by taking keys or the paper to his parents.

“Your’e got to look at the positive side of everything,” Conley said.

To learn more about Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) therapy, call 319/961-6945.

Dr. Kim's note:

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Sunny Kim, MD
Progressive Rehabilitation Medicine, P.L.C.