

Under new pain management

FRPHC approach to managing pain will be a relief for law enforcement officers

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

The pain for a law enforcement officer of dealing with the pain from an injury or wear and tear of the job fires from a treatment path like this:

You make an appointment to see your primary care physician, who maybe can prescribe an anti-inflammatory for that shooting sensation persisting in your lower back the past month.

The primary care doctor refers you to an orthopedist, who takes some X-rays and suggests a month of physical therapy. (Because that's all your insurance plan will allow.)

Physical therapy helps, but after a month you are cut off.

You go back to the primary care doctor, who refers you to a pain management specialist.

The pain management specialist suggests a procedure to relieve some of the inflammation.

You have temporary relief, but after working three consecutive 12-hour shifts the pain comes back.

A fellow officer relates getting some pain relief by seeing a chiropractor. You see the chiropractor, and after six months of twice-weekly visits and having to pay much of the cost out of pocket, you are not sure what to do.

It's a real pain in the you know what.

Believe it or not, relief from this pain management runaround might be in sight. The First Responder Partnership Health Center (FRPHC) that Integrity Health will be opening near Hamilton Township by the start of the summer will offer a truly feel-good approach to pain management.

"Perhaps the most important part of pain management is getting people in the hands of a team of experts and specialists so they aren't passed around like candy," advocates Doug Forrester, chairman and CEO of Integrity Health. "At our center, we have integrative services bringing together the best professionals from the full spectrum of care: a medical director, physical therapists, behavioral health specialists, chiropractors and the pharmacist. It's a very powerful combination that can do a lot of good in terms of solving pain problems."

Anecdotal research indicates that pain management might be the second biggest healthcare issue for law enforcement officers, behind mental healthcare. The anecdotal research is basically talking to any group of officers and hearing that several of them recognize how the hours of sitting in the patrol car, the weight of body armor and duty belts and the oodles of situations that lead to injury risk rack up the pain.

Forrester notes that 25 percent of every healthcare dollar spent is related to pain management, whether that be orthopedics, physiatrists, anesthesiologists, physical therapists, chiropractors and other specialists and modalities. Much of that is recurrent investment in a fragmented series of providers.

The website *ProPublica* reported in December 2019 that doz-



A Somerset County Corrections Officers Local 177 member at the physical therapy facility at the partnership health center in Somerset County.

ens of acupuncturists and physical therapists earned more than \$200,000 in 2018 from a sector of public employees. One reportedly brought in \$1 million.

And then there is the investment in pharmaceutical treatment. Too many law enforcement officers know this plight of pain management that leads to chemical dependence.

Does all of the above make you queasy?

You are not alone.

"Pain is unacceptable," Forrester challenges. "People will do anything to get rid of pain. What we have found is that there is an awful lot of effective pain management that minimizes the need for recurrent events. That can prevent people from developing chronic conditions. That can move them from a chronic condition to a very different direction. That is the fruit of our focused team approach."

The integrative approach of having an M.D. working with a physical therapist, chiropractor, pharmacist and behavioral health therapist is not available in the marketplace the way it is at the FRPHC. It's important to underline the significance of having behavioral health involved in the FRPHC whole-body concept because pain that comes from an injury can be exacerbated or prolonged by other challenges weighing on you, such as pending disciplinary action or a problem at home.

And raise your hand if you fall into this category: Your pain is so debilitating that it saps your strength and makes you emotionally more volatile. You need relief. You need it fast. And you don't want to have to schedule three appointments and wait six weeks.

The first thing you may notice walking into the FRPHC is that the pharmacy is right there. After seeing a primary care physi-

cian, you might be sent down the hall for an X-ray and then to see a physical therapist. The PT might consult with the chiropractor in the next office.

“It’s all about trying to find the root cause of the pain,” explains Catherine Hung, a physical therapist and orthopedic clinical specialist for Integrity Health. “What’s causing all this pain? Somebody has knee pain, but we don’t just focus on the knee. The pain might originate somewhere else. We look at the patient as a whole and treat the source of the pain.”

So how would it make you feel to have a multiple-discipline approach in which medical professionals are in constant communication about your issues? Unprecedented?

Hung says that while a patient is undergoing physical therapy, it’s common to bring in a chiropractor to address some of the recurrent issues. Together, they will assess the next step, which might be sending the patient to a pain management specialist.

Patients at the FRPHC will have their pain managed from a musculoskeletal perspective, as well as nerve-generated issues. The center has professionals like Dr. Mike Kircher, the chiropractic director, whose goal is to not keep you coming back three times a week for manipulations.

“Because we can look at patients as a whole and assess whether the cause might be postural or the effect of wearing a duty belt for 12 hours, we can educate them about what they can do to prevent the pain,” Kircher discloses. “With the facility set up the way it is, it allows me to be a better practitioner.”

The FRPHC also offers another form of relief. In addition to being able to schedule a same-day appointment, the barrier of approvals required can be relieved because you are getting all



NJ State PBA Executive Vice President Marc Kovar (left) and President Pat Coligan check out the physical therapy facility that is part of the partnership health center’s integrative approach to pain management.

the treatment integrated in one facility.

“Because we have an M.D. as medical director of the facility, we can address the issues that we think warrant further treatment,” Forrester adds. “Part of the problem with the fragmented approach in the marketplace is that each of those providers can’t get through the health plan. We have a close relationship with the State Health Benefits Plan, and the state is very interested in the integrative approach that says, ‘OK, let’s get people better rather than denying them care because of some artificial limit.’”







The First Responders Partnership Health Center (FRPHC) is the most exciting health care news in many years for first responders!

FRPHC is a collaborative effort of the first responder union leadership and Integrity Health, a well-known, New Jersey-based firm specializing in managing health plans from a patient-centered medical home platform called “Partnership Health Center”.

FRPHC Services will include:

**Same-day appointments • Doctor visits • Required Medical Exams/Physicals • X-ray • Lab work
 Rx • Physical Therapy • Chiropractic • Pain Diagnostics • Behavioral Health • Care coordination
 Disease Management • Wellness & Nutrition**

**These services will be available to you and your family,
 at a convenient location, from 7 a.m.-7 p.m., 7 days a week - 7/7/7**

The FRPHC will provide customized care by specially trained providers to meet the medical needs of first responders, and will eliminate:

- Delays in getting doctor appointments
- Shift work interfering with appointments
- Trouble with specialist referrals and lack of care coordination among them
- Providers unfamiliar with the unique health challenges of law enforcement.

www.IntegrityHealth.com