

## **Surgery?... Or No?**

Brightside December, 2019

By Dr. Derek Conte

A childhood friend from the old neighborhood and I reconnected on social media. She called one day to ask about a problem. She had been suffering for months with intractable neck pain and numbness in the right arm and weakness of her grip. She described her pain as 8-9/10, could not sleep more than two hours at a time, and took a medical leave of absence from work, and visited an orthopedic surgeon. Based on her MRI, cortisone shots and/or surgery were recommended, leaving her understandably worried.

It is impossible to know from a phone call what the prognosis might be under chiropractic care. While some bad-looking MRI's were beyond conservative help, some were helped with prudent, specific chiropractic care. I suggested she seek one locally, in California.

She wanted to come to Atlanta for me to look at her. First, we viewed the MRI's together and they looked bad, showing severe compression of the nerves exiting the spinal cord, significant disc degeneration, and severe compression of the cord itself to the degree that it was flattened. No wonder the orthopedist suggested surgery, but I let her know that chiropractic care would not be risky and at least some relief was possible. We took our time and performed a series of simple, targeted neurological and orthopedic tests. She told me that no one had tested her this way before.

The exam revealed there was much more going on than just neck problems. The nerves and vessels that fed her arm and hand were being compressed by very tight muscles in her chest, forearms and by the displacement of her right collar bone --- things often overlooked in suffering patients. I didn't think she believed me. She seemed skeptical, saying she had bad experiences with chiropractors, but we pushed on with the examination.

Her cervical range of motion was minimal and sharply painful. When we had her stand on bi-lateral scales to check weight distribution we found: 137 pounds on the Left side and only 75 pounds on the Right. Her head was slung forward and her left leg was almost one inch shorter than the right... hers was a system out of balance.

Time was short and we began her adjustments immediately. Though there was marginal improvement in her pain symptoms, her legs were balanced and her weight distribution was now Left: 109 and Right: 100. The objective improvements in her structure were extremely encouraging. Improved structure often precedes pain relief. Doctors who "chase the pain" get lost in the weeds. We concluded by giving her stretches for the chest and forearm muscles to allow the nerves to pass through the arm, unmolested.

The next day, she had her second adjustment, received a massage from our therapist, and awoke the next day with a pain level of 2 out of 10. She was advised to continue with the stretches and seek a good chiropractor as soon as she returned to California.

Two days later she e-mailed the following: "I have been doing the exercises. I want you to know that this is the first day I have been almost pain-free. I literally feel almost completely free of that shoulder pain. You know that spot under my shoulder blade that you found right away? ...that. I was really skeptical about all the things you were doing on my back at first. I've never had good experiences with chiropractors. You were so thorough showing me things on the board and how you explained it all to me. Thinking about it now and your intentionality to help me... thank you so much for taking the time to invest in me the way you did."

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