

More than skin deep

Biopuncture is an alternative procedure some say offers relief from everything from arthritis to the common cold

By [KIM MULFORD](#) • Courier-Post Staff • January 10, 2011

Angelo Cataldi calls himself "the world's biggest cynic." But after a year of debilitating shoulder pain, the Philadelphia sports radio personality decided to try biopuncture, an alternative treatment his doctor recommended.

Akin to acupuncture and homeopathy, biopuncture involves a series of injections just below the skin at various trigger points on the body. The practitioner injects "micro doses" of natural substances meant to stimulate the body's healing process.



Dr. Polina Karmazin of Integrated Family Medicine uses biopuncture in her practice. The homeopathic procedure uses minute substances injected just beneath the skin to stimulate the body's natural immune response. (AL SCHELL/Courier-Post)

The method is used to treat a range of maladies, from arthritis pain to the common cold.

Also called mesotherapy or acupoint injection therapy, the treatment is not mentioned on the websites of the American Medical Association or the International Association for the Study of Pain. The American Pain Society briefly mentions mesotherapy, calling it an "unproven technique."

And few studies have been done to determine its effectiveness, according to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, the leading federal institution that sponsors and funds research on alternative treatments.

Still, demand for biopuncture has been growing in recent years, according to Dr. Polina Karmazin and Dr. Robert Davis of Integrated Family Medicine in Voorhees. Their practice uses a combination of traditional medicine and alternative therapies, including acupuncture and biopuncture.

"The technique we're using does not suppress those natural processes," said Davis. "It promotes our natural healing process and encourages proper healing," without the side effects of conventional medicines.

The reason biopuncture isn't mentioned by organizations such as the American Medical Association is because the therapy relies on homeopathic medicines, the doctors said.

"It's not conventional medicine," said Karmazin. "We're using homeopathic medications. Regular physicians are really not familiar with that because it takes a lot of time and a lot of effort to learn that. It's a very complex discipline."

Patients who are weighing their treatment options should do their homework first, suggested Dr. Adam Perlman, executive director for The Institute for Complementary and Alternative Medicine within the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

Perlman said he is aware of biopuncture but hasn't performed it himself.

"As far as I know, there haven't been well-done clinical trials to validate this as an effective treatment," Perlman said. "Most of the data is anecdotal."

"For me, the advice would be to evaluate this the way you would any other medical treatment you would be considering," he said. Use the Internet to do some research and talk with a doctor, he said.

Ask if this treatment has been used in people with similar conditions. What have the results been? Is there a practitioner I feel comfortable with? What sort of adverse effects are there? Is it possible to talk with one of the patients?

It's especially important to ask what to expect, said Perlman. Find out how many treatments are required and at what point during the course of treatment should someone expect to see improvement.

For Cataldi, traditional pain killers did little to solve his shoulder troubles.

"I couldn't get my hand extended at all without horrible pain," the 59-year-old said. When Karmazin, his longtime doctor, suggested he try biopuncture, he agreed. He returned for weekly visits over the course of a month.



Partners Dr. Polina Karmazin and Dr. Robert Davis confer about biopuncture at Integrated Family Medicine in Voorhees. (AL SCHELL/Courier-Post)

"We've seen amazing results," said Davis, "especially results in knee pain, shoulder pain, elbow pain, arthritis -- and not just pain relief but improvement in function, the real daily day-to-day things that matter."

The two doctors have been offering the therapy for several years and were trained in the technique by Dr. Jan Kersschot. The Belgian doctor is known as the "father of biopuncture," according to Heel USA, the homeopathic pharmaceutical manufacturer that produces the substances used in the therapy.

Biopuncture is an alternative to conventional medicines, said Karmazin and Davis, especially for people who are leery of the numerous side effects of prescription-strength pain medication, which tend to suppress pain and inflammation.

"I think the pain got a little more focused, more intense, for a day or two," said Cataldi. "Then, it was incredible, just unbelievable. By the second week, most of the pain was gone. I had this for a year. Within four weeks, the pain was entirely gone."

Terri LaRoche of Stratford has suffered from arthritis for years. Told she was too young for knee replacement surgery, the 51-year-old had to walk down stairs backwards and could no longer walk the dog. When she bent her knees, she could hear them crunching and grinding.

But after her father found relief for his bad knees through biopuncture, she decided to give it a shot. She received a series of injections over four weeks last summer.

"Now, there's no pain," LaRoche said. "I was able to stop taking Celebrex (a prescription pain medicine)."

The father and daughter were able to dance at her son's wedding because of biopuncture, she said.

The relief doesn't last forever, LaRoche said, and she has to return for another injection "if I overdo it."

The treatments are not covered by insurance, said Karmazin and Davis, so patients must pay for the therapy out of pocket.

But LaRoche said it was worth it.

Cataldi called the treatment "amazing."

"This was absolutely the best response to any treatment," he said. "I'm now a massive proponent. It just worked."

IF YOU GO

Dr. Polina Karmazin and Dr. Robert Davis offer biopuncture at their **Integrated Family Medicine** practice at 701 Cooper Road, Suite 16, Voorhees. Call (856) 783-5000 or visit