

NEW TREATMENT SENDS WYO. BACK PAIN PATIENTS TO COLORADO

By: Michelle Dynes

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CHEYENNE – Back pain is one of the most common reasons people visit a doctor's office.

Muscle spasms, arthritis and damaged spinal discs create pain, numbness or weakness. Patients suffering from herniated or bulging discs often turn to a physical therapist or a surgeon to alleviate the symptoms.

Cheyenne resident Jed Moore said doctors recommended surgery after he injured his neck riding bulls this spring.

"It wasn't like I got whiplash or landed on my neck," he said. "I landed on my feet. But after one or two strides, I knew something was wrong."

The 30-year-old then searched for an alternative to the prescribed treatment that would have fused bone grafts from his hip onto his damaged vertebrae.

Today more patients like Moore are requesting a less-invasive option. And some chiropractors are learning how to use spinal disc decompression therapy to meet the growing demand.

The method is attracting Cheyenne patients like Moore to the Spine Correction Center of the Rockies in Fort Collins, Colo.

Dr. April Cardwell said she has used decompression therapy for almost two-and-a-half years. Her partner, Dr. Michael Farrell, and Colorado chiropractors in Fort Collins, Boulder and the Denver area also are trained to use the treatment.

X-rays of the affected area pinpoint abnormal curvatures and indicate whether a client is a candidate for the therapy.

Approved patients lie on a table that stretches the affected spinal discs. The pulling alleviates tension and allows the spine's shock absorbers to return to a more normal position. Cardwell said during a session a patient could get as many as 16 computer-assisted spinal stretches every second.

She added that the motion also acts like a turkey baster, allowing ruptured discs to reabsorb the gel that may have leaked out during the initial injury. The treatment is the most beneficial for patients suffering from bulging discs, herniated discs, spinal stenosis and facet syndrome.

Clients may require 20 to 40 visits, depending on the severity of the problem. Patients also are assigned exercises and stretches to strengthen the core muscles that support the spine.

Cardwell said while physical therapy alleviates pain and allows patients to postpone surgery, it doesn't treat spinal degeneration. She added that injury occurs when the spine develops abnormal curves.

Moore said he was pleased with the results. After a handful of sessions, his range of motion improved, and he was able to return to the gym. He added that earlier this month he returned to championship form and was able to take two first place wins in a bull riding competition.