

Scoliosis patients find new treatment

Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Monday, June 29, 2009

TWO OF THE FEWER THAN 20 CHIROPRACTORS NATIONWIDE OFFER NONINVASIVE TREATMENT AT THEIR CLINIC IN FORT COLLINS, COLO.

By: Michelle Dynes

CHEYENNE – Linda Hess thought her only options were a back brace or surgery.

Like 4.5 percent of the population, Hess suffers from scoliosis. The abnormal C- or S- shaped curve of the spine produces back, leg and hip pains that can get worse with age.

Patients also can experience muscle spasms, digestive disruptions and even difficulty breathing if the spinal curvature doesn't allow the lungs to properly inflate.

Hess said she wasn't interested in surgery that would fuse portions of her spine together. The medical procedure may prevent further degeneration, but it could limit her range of motion. Back braces also correct the problem, but only when worn for as many as 23 hours a day.

"I didn't want to do either," she added. "So I've been suffering with it."

But as patients search for alternatives, they can find more chiropractors who are trained in nonsurgical, noninvasive method. And the treatment option is attracting Cheyenne patients like Hess to the Spine Correction Center of the Rockies in Fort Collins, Colo.

Dr. April Cardwell said she and her partner, Dr. Michael Farrell, use a technique developed by the Clear Institute, a group of chiropractic physicians. She added that it blends chiropractic care and physical therapy that retrains the body to hold the correct posture.

Cardwell and Farrell are the only chiropractors in Colorado who are certified in the scoliosis treatment. Fewer than 20 chiropractors carry the specialty nationwide.

Cardwell said that the treatment involves a process called mix, fix and set. Mix is where a chiropractor loosens the muscles, tendons and ligaments of the spine in preparation for other treatments. The fix portion of the program involves a spinal adjustment, while the set part of the therapy attempts to lock the spine into its new position.

"It not only treats the bones, but the body as a whole," she added.

Patients are diagnosed through X-rays to determine the degree of the curvature and develop a customized plan for care. Cardwell said patients may visit her office several times a week, for a total of 20 to 60 visits. They also complete exercises at home to strengthen the muscles that hold the spine into place.

Hess said she was diagnosed with scoliosis in her late 20s after she visited a chiropractor with backaches. For nearly four decades, she relied on medications to ease the symptoms until she started the alternative treatment method last October.

She added that she's pleased with the results. Her severe backaches are gone, and she has found relief from the pain.