



ANDREW KAUFMAN, MD



Got Pain?

Here's the guy and the center that can help. **BY MARYANN BRINLEY**

Lucky for the 6,000 patients who found themselves on the doorstep of the Comprehensive Pain Management Center last year that director Andrew Kaufman, MD, loves what he does. And he's good at it. He was voted a "Best Doctor" in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area by Castle Connolly for the past two years. He treats acute and chronic pain, including everything from myofascial and neuropathic pain, headache, and trigeminal neuralgia to chronic regional pain syndrome, disc herniation, post-laminectomy syndrome, spinal stenosis, and post-herpetic neuralgia. The center also specializes in cancer, post-injury, or surgical pain. Only a certain kind of person would be able to say, "It's very rewarding."

Kaufman treats each patient very individually. "It's a puzzle. No one fits into a box. You need to think independently and

not focus on what others may have said. On a first visit, I don't look at a patient's files beforehand. I want to talk to them. And when they try to label themselves with a diagnosis or disease, I'll say, 'No, tell me where the pain is. What is the character of it? What makes it better? What makes it worse? Is it burning? Tingling?' I create a differential diagnosis from this interview before the physical exam and then try to support or refute my diagnosis. Only later will I look at the images and tests. We don't treat MRIs here, we treat people."

As for pain medication, he says, "There is a misconception that if you come to see me, I am going to give you pills. Far from it. The majority of our patients don't get pills and our goal is to get them off pills because in the long run, there are only bad things that can happen with pills. Now, for the short-term, we might need to bridge someone from one point to another with a medication." He may also refer patients to physical therapy, to a rheumatologist, an orthopaedist, a neurosurgeon, or a chiropractor, and also for various alternative therapies, including acupuncture, or exercises like yoga or Pilates.

"I'm a cheerleader with my patients," he says. "I want people moving and doing things from the cradle to the grave. I want them to be functional, and in fact, I always say that this shouldn't just be called a pain management center, it should be a functionality center."

Focused intensely on the diagnostics of pain and how to reduce it, Kaufman draws patients from across northern New Jersey. "I like to think we get the toughest cases because we are here at the medical school." With colleagues Anthony Sifonis, MD'05, Vanny Le, MD'06, and Chanmonie Kaulesar, NP-C, the team will implement treatments such as spinal cord stimulators, PCA (patient controlled anesthesia) pumps, indwelling catheters such as epidurals, TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) units, nerve blocks, radio frequency ablation, as well as the newest option, MILD (minimally invasive lumbar decompression) pro-

cedure. Created by Vertos Medical, "MILD is a very interesting procedure that has saved people from laminectomies," Kaufman says. "These are patients who have no other options. They may not be good surgical candidates and we are getting 60 to 65 percent improvement in their pain levels."

An anesthesiologist by training, Kaufman completed one of the very first fellowships in pain management at Harvard University. "We were the guinea pigs in this evolving field that is still in its infancy in a lot of ways. I think of myself as a clinical pharmacologist," someone who understands medications and interactions, but also trained in regional anesthesiology. "I need to understand the nerve distribution to create my diagnosis." And unlike other medical specialties, pain is very subjective. "If you ask someone to rate their pain on a scale of 1 to 10, one may be writhing on the floor and report an 8, while another may be talking calmly on the phone, giving the same number."

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Perhaps Kaufman's sensitivity to people in pain "stems from my dad," he admits, who was injured and lived with chronic head and neck pain. "He was a pharmacologist so he understood what was happening, did his own research and tried everything, including alternative therapies. He was never quite well his whole life and in constant pain. I saw this. This was back in the '70s. If he had this injury now, maybe he could have been treated in a much different way. Who knows? And maybe that's why I practice pain medicine." ●

To contact the Comprehensive Pain Management Center, call 973-972-2085.