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Lasers -- Have We Been Duped?

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Most people who know me personally, know I have been a strong advocate of soft laser (He Ne), sometimes known as "cold laser," since 1974 when my friend Dr. Marvin Spurling of Pittsburg, Kansas first introduced me to it.

Dr. Spurling had just returned from Austria where he'd become excited about the possibilities of He Ne laser and the applications it might have in his practice. He dropped by my office on his way home from the airport to show me his prize.

Under his arm was, as I now recall, an unusual looking modality which Dr. Spurling described as a helium, neon, red light laser. This laser had the promise of replacing needles in acupuncture therapy, and I must admit his enthusiasm was certainly contagious; however, I was resistant to his shining the light on me as I remembered too well the steel plate which James Bond was lying on was being totally destroyed by the simple shining of a similar light as it inched its way towards his groin. And what about that Matt Helm movie where the rock exploded as it came in contact with the red light laser. No, not me. I was not going to have him shine that thing on me. Dr. Spurling left the office shaking his head and grumbling something about a frog in the well not knowing of the great ocean.

Several weeks later I decided to pay Dr. Spurling a visit to see how, in fact, his "death ray" was working out. To my utter amazement the reports from his patients were absolutely mind-blowing as one after the other related their case history and response with this new-found modality.

As best as I can calculate, Dr. Spurling owned the first He Ne laser in North America, and I feel a sense of shame knowing I may well have been the first person in the Americas to doubt its clinical significance, as well as its safety.

Dr. Spurling was so intent on me becoming an advocate of laser, he drove to Kansas City (where I practiced at the time) and left me the laser to "play with" for two weeks. After staring at it for over one week, and realizing Dr. Spurling was going to pick it up in a few days, I mustered up the courage to try it on a patient with a non-responsive shoulder condition, who happened to be a pitcher for the Kansas City Royals and was about to be either released on permanent medical leave or transferred back to the minor leagues; therefore, I thought I had nothing to lose.

Using my knowledge of acupuncture, but this time using the laser instead of the needle, I proceeded with the treatment. Two things come to mind about that treatment: the first his excitement over the laser and the fact I didn't have to use needles; the second was the fact his shoulder was less restrictive at the end of the treatment than it had been in weeks; and he reported a 50 percent lessening of the pain.

From that point I began seeing many of the Kansas City Royals' difficult and non-responsive cases, and was regarded as a miracle man as the pitcher went on to become the star relief pitcher for the Royals for the remainder of that season, as well as the next three years when he successfully retired.

Since 1974, I suspect millions of patients have been treated with He Ne laser around the world. The research points out an extraordinarily high success rate with laser, despite the protests of the straight, needle only, acupuncturists.

Its benefits are many since it is non-invasive, non-painful, and achieves quick results. Further, it is safe from transmitting infection to either the patient or acupuncturist.

Significant research has been and continues to be conducted in some of the most respected research centers in the world and is being conducted clinically by literally thousands of practitioners internationally.

Not only does the research bear a testimony to its effectiveness, but the reports of practitioners and patients alike cannot be ignored.

So why do I title this article "Lasers -- Have We Been Duped?"

What we are now beginning to realize is the He Ne laser is not necessarily the means by which the results are being obtained. The He Ne laser operates in the red spectral range of 650 nm (+/- 30 nm). This light wave range is what makes it red as opposed to green or blue. It now appears the ancients had something going for them when they placed their sick in solariums draped with red curtains or used red stained-glass in

the monasteries of Europe during the Middle Ages.

What we are beginning to see in a nutshell is "laser therapy" can now be replaced with the terminology "photodynamic therapy" which may be administered successfully through a red light diode; and best yet is acceptable practice in those states which accept physiotherapy described as heat, light, water, sound, and electricity.

It must be remembered that cold laser, He Ne laser, and soft laser do not lase like the hot laser that James Bond found so uncomfortable or that are successfully employed in a variety of surgical procedures.

He Ne laser differs from diffuse light (sunlight, lightbulb etc.) only in that it is coherent light (focused beam) and does not disperse in 360 degrees. Does that mean to say you can obtain the same effect by placing an injured elbow up to the taillight of a '57 Olds? Not exactly, but the concept is interesting. However, you will be quite successful and save literally thousands of dollars by using a red light-emitting diode in place of He Ne laser.

Give it some thought, give it a try. You will only be impressed.

Note: To answer in advance the comments I may receive because of what may be construed as being hostile to He Ne laser -- please reread this column. In addition, "don't blame the messenger for the message." The fact of the matter is red light is red light is red light, whether produced by a He Ne laser tube for \$7,000 to \$40,000 or produced by a light-emitting diode at the same nanometer range for \$300. He Ne laser is fabulous, but so is red light.

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