

# The light side

Adding laser therapy to your practice could make you shine.

BY ANDREA PAXTON

**J**UST AS SUNLIGHT ENHANCES THE GROWTH AND HEALTH OF FLORA the world over, so laser light may enhance the growth and health of our cells. In both cases, light — both visible and invisible — effects tangible change.

As a DC confronted with an array of acute and chronic conditions in your patients, having a tool with the potential to stimulate long-term positive effects at the cellular level in a non-invasive way could revolutionize your practice, as well as your patients' lives.

Enter light — via laser therapy.

## Laser rising

Since the rise of laser technology in the 1960s, laser therapy has undergone myriad changes. Manipulating light is a complex process and harnessing the power of it has required an appropriate amount of respect, shown by serious time committed to research and development — and significant review by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The laser therapy industry has experienced growing pains, with FDA approval and guidelines for lasers fluctuating over the past 40 years.

Michael Martin, DC, has been

working with laser therapy for more than 30 years in his practice in Plano, Texas. In January 2004, he also founded a practice management firm named Chiro 1 Inc. and has been teaching DCs how to incorporate cold laser treatment into their practices. In fact, Martin's history with laser therapy began with a cold laser.

"I went to a seminar as a young DC, and there was this cold laser that was the only one that existed back then. I met the VP of the company, looked at the laser, and thought 'This is pretty cool.' This one had five times less power than a simple laser pointer does today."

Martin recalls that "the FDA got worried about laser therapy — that it might damage people's eyes, for example — and they took away laser clearance for any cold laser in the U.S. for about twenty years."

In that time, scientific understanding of lasers increased as did advancements in therapy laser technology. "We learned about the different effects of constant versus pulsed light, about laser power, and the effects of specific wavelengths of light," Martin says.

With laser clearance reissued about

10 years ago, Martin now uses laser in his practice, including a hand-held probe and one on a robotic arm that can be used unattended. The laser uses two combined frequencies, so the patient benefits from a constant beam (reduced inflammation) and a pulsed beam (pain relief). "The exciting part is that the total effect is greater than the sum of the laser treatments if they were done individually. The results can be truly remarkable," Martin says.

## Results matter

If you're going to add laser therapy to your practice, it's good to know why. As both Martin and Andy Barlow, DC, the founder and one of six instructors for the American Functional Neurology Institute, indicate, the client results are significant, especially in decreasing inflammation and pain and supporting tissue repair.

Barlow says, "It's benefitted our patients because it requires less time for the healing process. And to me, that's what it's all about: getting them better as fast as possible and [having] confidence as a doctor that you'll improve their quality of life."

"I had one patient who had five

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### End Reliance on Reimbursements and Boost Revenue

Although laser therapy may not be reimbursable in the traditional sense, patients are willing to pay for this service out of their own pockets, freeing the practice from the reimbursement compensation structure that limits their cash flow. Each time the treatment is performed, it generates an instant revenue stream.

*“I had the unit completely paid for in the first two months, and my bottom line has gone up dramatically, probably in the area of 30–40 percent in the first year. And the results are amazing. I’m probably getting over 80 percent of my arthritic patients better.”*

— Mark Grennell, DC  
South Suburban Chiropractic

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failed back surgeries, and now he looks like he never had pain,” Barlow says.

Martin has enjoyed similar results: “Sprained ankles, knee sprains, cartilage damage, and back and neck conditions get out of pain more quickly.”

Martin says, “When you do higher level service in chiropractic, you’re able to set advanced treatment goals with clients. After other treatments failed, some patients are now able to go back to activities such as running, golf, taking care of and playing with kids and grandkids. When you see the results, you say, ‘Wow!’”

### Getting practical

When adding laser therapy to your practice, consider the practical matters.

**Define your treatment goals.** Martin advises DCs to expand and encourage higher-level treatment goals with patients, which may result in better outcomes. “You make patients happier, and you profit as well,” he says.

**Know thy laser.** Wavelength, wattage, frequencies, and whether a laser works as an attended, a semi-attended, or an unattended therapy, will all play a role in how laser therapy gets incorporated into your practice.

Barlow opted for a model that offers unattended therapy. A hand-held laser requires somebody standing there to hold it. And, of course, you must pay that person, so weigh your options strategically.

**Be safe.** Barlow and Martin both highlight safety protocols. Doctors and patients must wear glasses and be in an individual treatment room. Training and certification with the DC and staff is also essential.

Ultimately, adding laser therapy greatly enhances your ability to treat a wider range of patients. From treating cases of failed back surgery to plantar fasciitis, you may broaden your reach, increase your income, and get more clients healthier in a shorter time. **CE**



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