

# Managing a Pain in the Neck

This nurse's trusted specialist not only finds a life-threatening problem, but also helps her get her life back.

"I had very severe migraines," says Terina Choate, RN, "these blinding, debilitating headaches that kept recurring. They went on twenty-four hours a day; there was no relief."

The problem became increasingly severe, affecting every area of Terina's activities.



## SOUTHWEST FLORIDA NEUROLOGICAL & REHAB ASSOCIATES

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"It interfered with my work and my personal life," she continues, "and was so debilitating I couldn't sleep. My life stopped: when I got out of bed in the morning, I was just trying to figure out whether I could move."

As a medical professional, Terina thought she would find effective relief quickly, but that didn't prove to be the case.

"Nobody knew what was wrong with me," she explains, "and even a neurologist thought it was just job-related stress. I got a lot of injections for inflammation in my neck area, but the benefits were only temporary. They called it *cervicalgia*, which is just pain in the neck!"

Finally, Terina found Robert D. Mehrberg, MD, a board-certified physiatrist with Southwest Florida Neurosurgical & Rehab Associates.

"When I saw Dr. Mehrberg, he took a look at my MRI scans and, of course, he treated me for pain because I was practically immobilized. Then he referred me to Jaime A. Alvarez, MD, a neurosurgeon with Southwest Florida Neurosurgical Associates in Fort Myers.

"It turned out that my neck had collapsed," explains Terina. "I had three ruptured discs in my neck, but no one had diagnosed it before."

## Reducing the pain

"Terina had migraine headaches for about six years," reports Dr. Mehrberg. "By the time she came to us, she had already tried some medication and injections, but we ultimately found that she had significant neck issues: herniated discs, degenerative disc disease, and spinal stenosis.

"We felt that the neck pain and the headaches were coming from the bulging discs, and we referred her for a

fusion procedure. The surgery actually resolved the headaches, but because of the severity of her situation, she still had some pain issues after surgery."

Fortunately, Dr. Mehrberg employs a number of approaches to help restore comfort and function for patients like Terina who suffer chronic pain. Pain-relieving or muscle-relaxing injections, trigger point therapy, hot and cold compresses, physical therapy and stretches, and electrical stimulation all can be helpful for patients.

"Whether it's for the neck or the back, surgery may not completely cure the patient," reminds Dr. Mehrberg, "and that's what we're here to deal with – the individual problems patients may have. Trigger point injections, BOTOX injections, and medication management all can help.

"Our goal is to reduce the pain and allow the patient to function, providing as much pain relief as possible," explains the doctor. "Terina is doing a lot better than when we first saw her. She was pretty much in agony before she came to us, and now she's functioning very well."

## Happy patient

Terina is thankful that Dr. Mehrberg discovered her underlying problem and referred her for that very necessary surgery.

"They had to stabilize it so I wouldn't take a couple of steps and break my own neck. My neck was so frail I could have broken it just by getting out of bed.

"I had an anterior cervical discectomy with fusion of three vertebrae," she explains. "Because of the fact that it's so high up on my neck, I have very little movement in my neck."

Terina confirms that she no longer has the migraines that interfered with her life for so long.

"I'm grateful that I don't have those debilitating headaches anymore," she says. "I knew I was always going to have chronic pain. It was just a question of, *How do I manage so that I can still be active and have a quality of life?*"

"Pain management is so important because it allows me to be the person I was prior to all these problems," she states. "And the most important thing is to keep the medication to the lowest amount that will relieve the pain."

Terina credits Dr. Mehrberg with her results and adds that his skills are just part of what made him her number one choice.



"Dr. Mehrberg is the second most important man in my life...after my fiancé," says Terina.

"Dr. Mehrberg is just so compassionate and empathetic," she says, "and he takes a personal interest in developing a relationship with his patients. He's not only concerned about my pain, but also concerned about me establishing the life I used to have.

"He has gotten me through some really rough times," reflects Terina. "I thought life as I knew it had ceased, but now life is good again!" **FHCN**—Michael J. Sabno



**James P. Weiner, MD**, is board certified by the American Board of Anesthesiology. He received his medical degree and completed his residency in physical medicine and rehabilitation at Eastern Virginia Medical School, Norfolk, and completed an anesthesia residency and received fellowship training in pain management at the Naval Hospital, Portsmouth, VA. He also received fellowship training in anesthesia at Bowman-Gray Medical Center, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC. He is a member of the American Association of Electrodiagnostic Medicine, American Association of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, American Society of Anesthesiology, Florida Medical Society, Florida Society of Anesthesiology, International Association for the Study of Pain, and International Spinal Injection Society. He has published extensively in his areas of expertise.



**Robert D. Mehrberg, MD**, is a board-certified physiatrist, certified in physical medicine and rehabilitation, as well as in electrodiagnostic medicine. He completed his undergraduate studies and earned his medical degree at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. He served his internship and his residency in physical medicine and rehabilitation at Eastern Virginia Medical School, Norfolk, where he was appointed chief resident. Dr. Mehrberg has lectured on, written, or coauthored numerous articles, abstracts, presentations, and publications concerned with the treatment and well being of rehabilitation patients. Dr. Mehrberg is a member of the American Association of Electrodiagnostic Medicine, American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and Association of Academic Physiatrists.



**Pierre R. Hyppolite, MD**, is fellowship-trained in spinal cord injury through the University of Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital/Miami VA Medical Center. He is a graduate of the Faculte De Medicine Et De Pharmacie Universite D'etat d'Haiti, where he earned his medical degree and served his medical internship. Dr. Hyppolite attended Yale University School of Public Health and served an internal medicine internship at the New York Medical College's Our Lady of Mercy Medical Center. He completed his residency in physical medicine and rehabilitation at NYMC's Metropolitan Hospital Center.

Dr. Hyppolite is an associate member of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and the American Paraplegia Society. He is fluent in English, French, and Creole.

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The staff at Southwest Florida Neurosurgical & Rehab Associates welcome your questions and comments regarding this article. For additional information or to schedule a consultation, please call or visit one of their conveniently located offices: in Fort Myers at (239) 432-0774, 12700 Creekside Ln., Suite 301, and in Cape Coral at (239) 772-5577, 413 Del Prado Blvd. South, Suite 201.

Please visit Southwest Florida Neurosurgical & Rehab Associates on the web. Go to [www.swfna.com](http://www.swfna.com) and select "Pain Management & Rehabilitation" from the menu at the top of the screen.