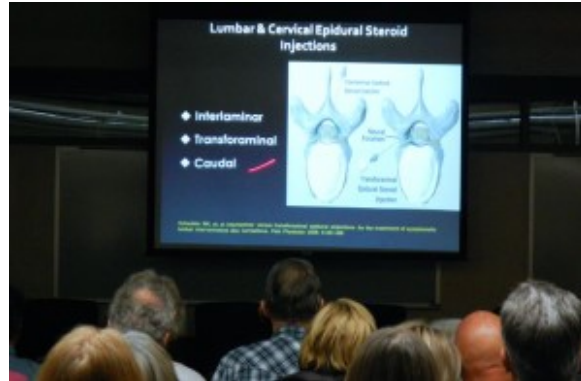


Docs dissect remedies for low back pain



Barton doctors talk about different low back pain treatment. Photos/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Surgery isn't going to always relieve back pain nor is surgery always the best option.

That is what doctors Mike Fry with Tahoe Fracture and Orthopedic Clinic and Alison Ganong with Tahoe Orthopedics and Sports Medicine told a group of more than 60 people last week.

Fry's approach is more traditional – with drugs and surgery the main course of action.

Ganong takes a more holistic approach, where drugs might be a component, but the whole person and what their lifestyle is like is considered.

While most people at some point in their life will have low back pain, there are different types of lumbar diseases. Lumbar stenosis is what the doctors focused on.

Fry said people 50 and older are more often afflicted and can also have other issues going on like diabetes. Some people are born with it, while others acquire it over time.

Pain can be in the back, legs and glutes. Usually pain is most severe when sitting or lying down. More than half of back patients have numbness and less than half have weakness.

Fry explained that how people describe pain running down their leg could help narrow which of the five vertebrae is being affected.



Screws used in back surgery.

“Surgery treats the symptoms of the disease, not the disease,” Fry said. “The degenerative process is still an ongoing problem with the spine after the operation.”

For Ganong, it’s a team approach to finding a remedy for the pain.

“It’s important to find out what causes the pain,” she said.

She likes physical therapy to be used early on because staying active is critical. Gone are the days when people with back pain are confined to bed.

Ganong is a proponent of the whole body being strong, especially deep muscles and the core. She pointed out how so much physical activity requires a strong core – like serving in tennis and pitching in baseball.

She works with patients on distinguishing between pain and function. When the pain limits ones ability to do something, that is much worse than being able to play-work through the pain.

When asked about the use of braces, both doctors said it is not a tool they favor except for possibly in post-operative situations. The no to braces is because the muscles become reliant on it.

As for whether a certain mattress can help people with back issues, a firm one is all they would say.

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Notes:

- The next Barton Wellness Lecture is Feb. 12 from 6-7m on Sleep Apnea & Cardiovascular Disease. David Young with Barton Cardiology will be giving the talk at Lake Tahoe Community College.