Simon has been pioneer in pain management field

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January 12, 2011

Dr. Dana L. Simon takes extra time to identify the cause of his patients' pain, using a comprehensive approach to help them return to a normal lifestyle.

Simon, medical director of the Mercy Center for Pain Medicine, is a pioneer in the field. He opened the center in 1981, a time when pain management was not well known and often criticized.

Today, the main clinic based at Mercy Medical Center helps 500 to 600 patients a month and has six fellowship-trained physicians. Services are also offered in West Des Moines, Ankeny, Pella, Winterset and Nevada.

While 70 percent of cases are related to spine pain, the center treats everything from neck and back pain to complex regional pain syndrome or dystrophies. Patients should seek help at a pain clinic if they've gone more than two months without relief, he said.

Q. How do you assess patients' pain?

What we try to do here is put the whole package together. When the patient comes in, we try to see them as a person. We try to see how it influences their work, how it influences their life.

Q. What treatment options does the clinic offer?

- Physical therapy, including aquatic therapy.
- Advanced nerve block procedures with x-ray control for patient safety.
- Evaluation for spinal pumps, a technique in which medication is infused into the spinal fluid through an implanted pump.
- Radio frequency procedures for spine pain problems.
- Spinal cord stimulation.
- Treatment of cancer pain.
- Epidurals for leg and arm pain associated with the spine.
The pain center also works with several health care specialists, including psychologists and the Mercy Spine Center, and patients are often referred by neurosurgeons, orthopedic surgeons and oncologists, he said.

Q. What are some of the goals of pain management?

One of the goals of therapy is to try to streamline treatments so that they can be simplified as much as possible to those which are more effective, to align them more to prevention and to try to eliminate unnecessary procedures, such as surgery or even the procedures that we do.

Figures show that we're spending about $100 billion a year in economic costs simply for low-back pain. Two-thirds of that is in lost wages and productivity, the rest is for treatment. Prevention in the workplace is extremely important. Some of these injuries can be prevented by good preventative health care program and business programs that emphasize safety.