

## **Ailing athletes' shocking treatment a wave of future**

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Professional and amateur athletes are flocking to a private clinic on West Broadway, home of the world's first free-standing shock wave treatment centre for chronic tendinitis.

The German-made machine used in the treatment is a lower-energy, modified, more portable version of the lithotripsy machine used for a dozen years to break up kidney stones.

Doctors and other health care professionals attended an open house Tuesday night at the Sonorex Therapy Centre to hear about the acoustical shock wave treatment, which costs \$750 for three 15-minute sessions and is not covered by the Medical Services Plan.

"Tendinitis is the scourge of sports," said David Lowy, vice president of Sonorex Canada.

That explains why the cost of the treatment is not a deterrent for professional and even amateur athletes. Before he died in a plane crash last fall, golfer Payne Stewart tried the Sonocur machine for his heel spur while in Vancouver for a tournament. Canucks hockey captain Mark Messier has used it on his arm and so have some NBA basketball players.

Health Canada approved the device last year, but U.S. approval is still pending, so the Vancouver clinic has the temporary market advantage of being able to offer the treatment to Americans.

The treatment works best on conditions like tennis or golfer's elbow, and tendinitis in the shoulder, wrist, knee or heel. Success rates for such musculoskeletal problems have been reported at 75 to 90 per cent.

Vancouver orthopedic surgeon Dr. Brian Day, who acts as a medical consultant to Sonorex, said it is not a "miracle cure," but its value has been established in numerous studies published in medical journals. And, as a painless, non-invasive treatment, it can act either as a last resort or as a safe substitute for steroid injections, surgery and anti-inflammatory drugs.

On the machine, a moveable arm suspends the shock wave head for positioning over the body part to be treated. An electromagnetic source produces pulsating sound waves that feel like a pencil head tapping firmly on the skin.

Although the exact way it works is still unclear, three explanations have been offered:

- The shock waves stimulate the nerves through pathways that inhibit pain sensation transmission.
- Shock waves stimulate increased blood supply to the painful area to reduce inflammation.
- Shock waves alter the chemical compounds in the painful areas.

However it works, Richmond high school teacher Don McCormick, who has been a fixture on the competitive B.C. tennis scene for many years, said it has helped eliminate his pain.

McCormick suffered pain from tennis elbow for years. That changed after he was paired with Day in a doubles tournament at Vancouver Lawn Tennis and Badminton Club.

Day referred McCormick for the treatment and the pain relief was almost immediate.

“It had gotten to the point where I could barely serve. I’d tried everything from cortisone shots, physiotherapy, massage therapy, weight training and acupuncture. Nothing really worked until this,” said McCormick, who now admits to being akin to a “poster boy” for the treatment.