



The fantastic staff at Orthopedic Physical Therapy Inc.

sponsor spotlight By Karen Sternad

Welcome to Orthopedic Physical Therapy Inc.

Dr. Tracey Adler and her team of physical therapists address the source of your chronic pain.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to addressing chronic pain, but Dr. Tracey Adler of Orthopedic Physical Therapy Inc. believes that finding the source of the pain is the key. When addressing and treating pain syndromes, Dr. Adler and her team take a hands-on approach and are dedicated to understanding patients' entire medical histories.

Adler decided to be a physical therapist at age thirteen while volunteering at a school for handicapped children, and she never looked back. Her father was in the Navy, and she was no stranger to moving around, having lived in California, Rhode Island, England, and northern Virginia before college. Continuing her lifelong trend of making big moves, she chose the University of Mary Washington and Georgia State for physical therapy school before settling in Richmond to earn her masters, and eventually her doctorate. When she isn't traveling to visit her twin daughters in Maryland and California, she is helping her patients at Orthopedic Physical Therapy Inc., which she opened in 1984.

Orthopedic Physical Therapy Inc. was especially unique when it opened because it was not affiliated with a hospital or a physician group, which were the most common places for patients to receive physical therapy at the time. Dr. Adler wants to encourage patients who suffer from pain to begin with a physical therapist and possibly avoid unnecessary surgical intervention or drugs. "In Virginia, you can see a physical therapist without a doctor's

referral for thirty consecutive days. While that isn't the equivalent of thirty treatments, you can still see a physical therapist for two to three weeks without a doctor's note. Our team is able to determine whether you would benefit from physical therapy, but we also know when it's time to refer you to the appropriate medical professional. We are a good place to start," says Dr. Adler.

The team of physical therapists at Orthopedic Physical Therapy Inc., which has won many awards for its bedside manner, believes in spending plenty of time with patients to better understand their needs. "I tell patients that I hope they're here for our hands and our brains. I'm not interested in charging someone just to come in and ride a bike or exercise," says Dr. Adler. "Our biggest focus is evaluating people to find the source of their pain. We spend a lot of hands-on time with our patients, and that whole atmosphere is one reason we've been around for 35 years. We also evaluate whether or not trigger points are a component of the source of pain. Trigger points are knots in the muscles that may cause pain or limitation of motion," explains Dr. Adler.



Dr. Tracey Adler



Sammy the therapy dog!



Dr. Adler with her daughters, Talya (left) and Sheera (right)

Trigger points may refer pain to a different part of the body. For example, if someone comes in complaining of pain in the front of the shoulder, Dr. Adler's team might look for trigger points in the shoulder blade area that are causing the pain to refer to the front. "We see many people with chronic pain who have gone to other places and have not found relief. I recently saw a 31-year-old woman who'd had three ankle surgeries and multiple treatments, but no one had ever touched her or evaluated above her ankle. Whether people come in with a jaw problem, ankle problem, or back problem, we look at the whole body. I checked her back and range of motion, and because of her years of ankle issues, she has some limitations in her back that needed to be treated before I did anything for her ankle. By treating those areas, it changed the whole way her foot and ankle felt."

Trigger points may develop after a muscle injury, but that doesn't necessarily mean something drastic has occurred. "Trigger points may also develop with static postures, such as sitting at a computer or a piano for as few as 30-60 minutes, repetitive

movements, and over-exercising. Once this occurs, people often have a cascading event where they're experiencing pain, so their posture gets worse. In turn, that perpetuates the trigger points and causes more pain," says Dr. Adler.

One of the many tools and techniques that Dr. Adler's team uses to treat trigger points is dry needling, a technique she started offering in Richmond sixteen years ago, which continues to gain popularity. Though trigger points have been recognized since the 1940s, dry needling began in the 1980s. Trigger points were treated with hypodermic needles and injected with lidocaine or other numbing agents. It became evident that the trigger point would release even before the medicine was injected, so began the technique of "dry needling." Studies show that there are certain chemicals in these trigger points that normalize upon the insertion of a needle, releasing the trigger point and relieving pain. Since medication was no longer being injected, the hypodermic needle was replaced with a solid filiform needle.

"Patients have compared dry needling to letting air out of a balloon," says Dr. Adler. "They typically won't feel the needle go in, but once the needle is inserted into the trigger point, the patient will feel a deep ache or cramp, and then they will feel the muscle twitch and release." More studies are needed to understand why the release occurs, but many patients leave Dr. Adler's office thankful that it does. While the untrained eye may be reminded of acupuncture, Dr. Adler clarifies that the two practices are very different. "They utilize the same type of needle, but the comparison ends there. The insertion, location, and philosophy are all very different."

Using dry needling, Adler has helped patients manage many chronic pain issues. "Whatever diagnosis you are given, whether it's fibromyalgia, migraines, or something else, it is usually describing your symptoms rather than the source of the pain. When it comes to the musculoskeletal system, imaging doesn't always diagnose the entire problem. If I see a patient who's been diagnosed with a disc herniation, I can't change that with treatment. But, if part of their pain is coming from the muscle, and they get 80% better after treatment, there's a good chance that 80% of their pain was coming from muscle and only 20% from the actual disc," says Dr. Adler. A variation of the technique called "scar needling" has also helped patients struggling from poor range of motion and tenderness caused by scar tissue, such as women with uncomfortable c-section scars.

Adler and her team are educated to evaluate the entire musculoskeletal system, and their therapies include much more than just dry needling. If you suffer from pain, Orthopedic Physical Therapy Inc. is the perfect place to begin your quest for relief. Adler even makes time to travel the country and teach classes on dry needling while her team holds down the fort. "I have an amazing staff, some of whom have been with me for over twenty years," says Adler. The team at Orthopedic Physical Therapy Inc. is truly dedicated to digging into the source of your discomfort and helping you live a pain-free life. Learn more at www.orthopedicptinc.com.