

# Don't Give Up

## THERE IS HOPE FOR CHRONIC PAIN RELIEF

After years of living with pain, Carolyn Laraway finds help at Center for the Healing Arts.

Eleven years ago Carolyn Laraway was a 48-year-old working mother who balanced a career in sales with raising three children. She was physically active, in very good health, and her life was full of soccer, football, golf and traveling with her husband Mike.

On December 10, 2003 Carolyn's life took a drastic turn when she fell off a curb and broke the metatarsal bone in her left foot. She had broken her right foot in college and was treated successfully with a cast, so she expected that with a cast and some time off work, she would be good to go after the holidays. However, to her disappointment, she was still in a great deal of pain when the cast was removed. After three more weeks in a walking boot and more time off work, the pain had not improved. "I started to feel in the pit of my stomach that something was wrong," Carolyn said.

Although her X-rays were normal, the orthopedic surgeon told the Laraways that he feared Carolyn had Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophym (RSD). "It was a shock, and the details are a blur now; but I remember him saying there is no cure, and treatment varies from doctor to doctor. He also said that I could end up in a wheelchair and gave his sympathies. He referred me to a pain clinic nearby to start physical therapy. My husband and I drove home in disbelief, confused and scared to read any more about the disease. We were in a total fog," she said.

Carolyn's pain was excruciating, and it was difficult for her family and friends to understand the burning, stabbing, lightening bolts that were going through her left foot. The pain soon started in her right foot as well, with unbearable episodes happening at any given moment.

"We felt it was time to try another pain center as life was spinning out of control. I started realizing also that all the medications, nine pills a day, were doing nothing but just keeping me in bed," said Carolyn. She decided to look into other forms of treatments and get off as many pain medications as possible. In 2005 spinal cord stimulators were



becoming the treatment that was helping the best. She was desperate to feel better and come off medication, so she underwent the procedure to have the stimulator surgically implanted.

Her pain levels went down, and the episodes weren't as frequent. However, on a bad weather day, the pain would spike back up to a 10. "I knew I had to get myself strong physically and mentally again if I had any shot at getting somewhat better," she said. Goals every day were small: walk further than the mailbox, stop using her cane and eat as healthy as possible. It is not in her nature to give in, so she pushed herself and decided to focus on the healing that had occurred.

Carolyn became an Ambassador for St. Jude's

Neuromodulation division to share how her spinal cord stimulator was giving some relief and hope. "I wasn't cured, but I was getting some of my life back. By 2008 I was off all my medications. Acupressure was another form of treatment offered to me. The two treatments helped. I actually started to feel stronger mentally and physically. It was a turning point for me and my family. My daughter later told me, she learned how powerful the mind is in overcoming pain and adversity as she watched me have continuous mind over matter and not letting the disease conquer me," Carolyn said. "After five difficult years I really felt I had found a place with my disease that was as good as I could have."

However, the winter of 2014 was particularly cold, and Carolyn's RSD worsened. Her neighbor told her about Center for the Healing Arts, a new clinic that had opened in February. She was curious and decided to approach them about sponsoring a 5K race/walk to raise awareness and funds for research for RSD/CRPS.

"I first spoke with Carolyn on the phone as she asked me questions about my practice," said Dr. Babak Mokari, D.O. "She asked me if I had ever treated RSD with osteopathic manipulation therapy (OMT). I explained to her that although I had not specifically treated RSD in the past, I was confident that it could help. As she explained her difficult journey to me, I knew that there were components of her condition that could improve. She asked a lot of great questions, and I knew then that she was not accepting her diagnosis as a death sentence."

At the initial visit Dr. Mokari spent ninety minutes carefully listening and taking account of the circumstances at the beginning of her pain as well as all the things that she had tried along the way. They also talked about the emotional toll RSD had taken on her and her family. She became very emotional through several parts of the interview. Despite the changing diagnoses and negative prognosis and limited improvement, she was not giving up on getting better.



During the osteopathic physical exam Dr. Mokari found dysfunction and treated some specific areas in her neck and lower back. Partly through the treatment portion she asked to turn off her spinal stimulator. She was feeling some improvement in her legs but wanted to be sure it wasn't in her head. At the end of the visit Carolyn was still feeling pain in her hand, but the leg pain seemed better. She had a busy week coming up and stated she would call for an appointment. She left without turning her spinal stimulator back on.

Carolyn returned a few weeks later than planned as she was caring for her dying mother. Despite her obvious stressor, she was delighted to report that she had not needed to use her spinal stimulator since her treatment.

"When I saw her again, Carolyn seemed like a new person. She was so pleased about the improvement in her leg pain. She again became tearful as she recalled living with the pain in her legs for eleven years and relying on the spinal stimulator for eight years. We then focused on her hand pain. This time I incorporated acupuncture to the treatment, and at the follow up visit a week later she was smiling ear-to-ear and told me that her hand pain was nearly gone," said Dr. Mokari.

"I am very happy to report that I continue to feel really good and have not had my stimulator on since June 10th. Because I feel stronger it has enabled me to get out in the community even more to help raise awareness and funds for our annual race for RSD/CRPS. I hope that my story will inspire all those living with chronic pain to never lose hope and to look for nontraditional treatments as a powerful option to reduce your pain and get your life back," she said. \*

To learn more about Center for the Healing Arts visit [healingartscharlotte.com](http://healingartscharlotte.com) or call 704.315.5756.

### THE FACTS ABOUT RSD/CRPS

Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) formerly known as reflex sympathetic dystrophy (RSD) is a chronic systemic disease characterized by severe pain, swelling, and changes in the skin. CRPS is expected to worsen over time.

Clinical features include swelling in the central nervous system, extreme sensitivity, blood flow problems which cause swelling and discoloration and brain adaptation changes with constant pain signals. Treatment is complicated, involving drugs, physical therapy, psychologic treatments, and neuromodulation and is usually unsatisfactory.



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