

LIFE WITHOUT PAIN – SPINAL THERAPIES

Schönau: Neurochirurgische Schmerzpraxis Dr. med. Andreas Potschka



Patients who visit Dr Andreas Potschka's practice suffer from a wide variety of complaints, all of which are extremely painful. Many of these sufferers have spent a long period of time moving from one doctor to another, without any success. The most common complaints are back pain accompanied by pain in the legs, the excruciating consequences of slipped discs and muscular pain. Dr Potschka – an experienced spinal specialist and rehabilitation doctor – runs a neurosurgical pain relief clinic in Schönau. The neurosurgeon has dedicated himself to the subject of pain ever since he was a medical student – he was even undertaking cutting-edge research into pain relief during his final doctorate studies.

Pain is a complex sensation that can have a number of causes. A comprehensive diagnosis is therefore absolutely essential before any treatment takes place, and the clinic's patients play an active role in identifying the source of the pain. As soon as an appointment is made, they are given a questionnaire to fill out that can help diagnose the source of their pain. Experts have to make a strict distinction between diagnosis and treatment when treating pain. After consultation with the patient (in which the aforementioned

**"To treat
pain you
have to have
trust"**

questionnaire plays an important role) and a detailed physical examination, if necessary using X-rays and spinal tomography, the doctor is then able to identify the most likely source of the pain. Only then can an individually tailored programme of treatment commence.

The best-known methods for relieving chronic back pain are medication and surgical intervention, often involving major open procedures. Anti-inflammatories and/or pain suppressants are most effective in less-complicated cases. The latter, in particular pain relievers that affect the central nervous system (opioids), enable 'pain memory' to be modulated or to be blocked completely. Dr Potschka believes that "when combating back pain – in particular slipped discs – the primary objective should be avoiding unnecessary operations and delaying inevitable procedures for as long as possible". Until recently there has been little in the way of alternative treatments, but that's all changing now.

The wide range of interventional procedures on offer at Dr Potschka's practice have proven to be relatively gentle and often extremely efficient. Importantly, most of these procedures can also be carried out without the use of a scalpel.



Depending on the source and intensity of the pain, the neurosurgeon has a variety of different interventional treatments at his disposal, all with one thing in common – they alleviate pain without the need for major, open surgical procedures. The doctor can often provide relief using targeted injections with the assistance of X-ray screening – pain-causing nerves are 'calmed' and inflammation is reduced. Sometimes however a minor outpatient operation is necessary, in which even the smallest nerves in the vertebral joints can be destroyed using a thin, computer-controlled heat probe. Pain transmission is thus interrupted, allowing most patients to live comfortably for at least one year. This method has virtually no complications and can be repeated at any time. Relatively simple physiotherapy techniques such as heat therapy are often suitable for patients suffering from muscular pain. If these methods do not work, Dr Potschka has experienced success in administering miniscule targeted injections into

'trigger points' (small knots in the muscles that hurt when pressure is applied and which can be felt from the surface of the skin), leading to a rapid subsidence of pain.

"A number of pain syndromes related to the musculo-skeletal system, such as degenerative joint and spinal conditions, and nerve pain caused by diet-related metabolic disorders, are directly or indirectly caused by poor diets. Changing eating habits accordingly can really help relieve pain", explains the doctor. For this reason a detailed diet consultation forms an integral part of the practice's programme of treatment.

The pain relief clinic is also more than capable of meeting the needs of English-speaking patients. Dr Potschka has experience of a number of similar practices in the USA, and undertook practical placements at clinics in Richmond and Boston. He is more than happy to interact directly with sufferers who speak English.

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Dr. Potschka

About Dr Andreas Potschka:

Dr Potschka studied medicine at the University of Münster and the University of Freiburg. He spent most of his practical year in Switzerland – in Lucerne hospital and at the University of Basle. At the start of his career as a neurosurgeon Dr Potschka worked as a medical intern at the Landshut neurological clinic. After receiving his license at the end of 1992 he worked as an assistant doctor in Berlin and Dresden, then as an assistant medical director in Kreischa near Dresden. Since 1999 he has been working as a pain specialist for neurosurgery in Schönau, where he also lives. He places great value on expanding and strengthening his specialist skills. As well as specializing in neurosurgery, Dr Potschka has obtained a number of additional qualifications and completed several professional development courses. For example, he is certified as a specialist in pain therapy and rehabilitation techniques and has a professional qualification in computer tomography. He is also authorised to train other doctors in specific specialist fields.

Dr Potschka is a member of numerous medical associations and organisations, most notably the German Association for the Study of Pain, the Germany Society for Neurosurgery, the German Neurological Association and the American Association of Neurological Surgeons.