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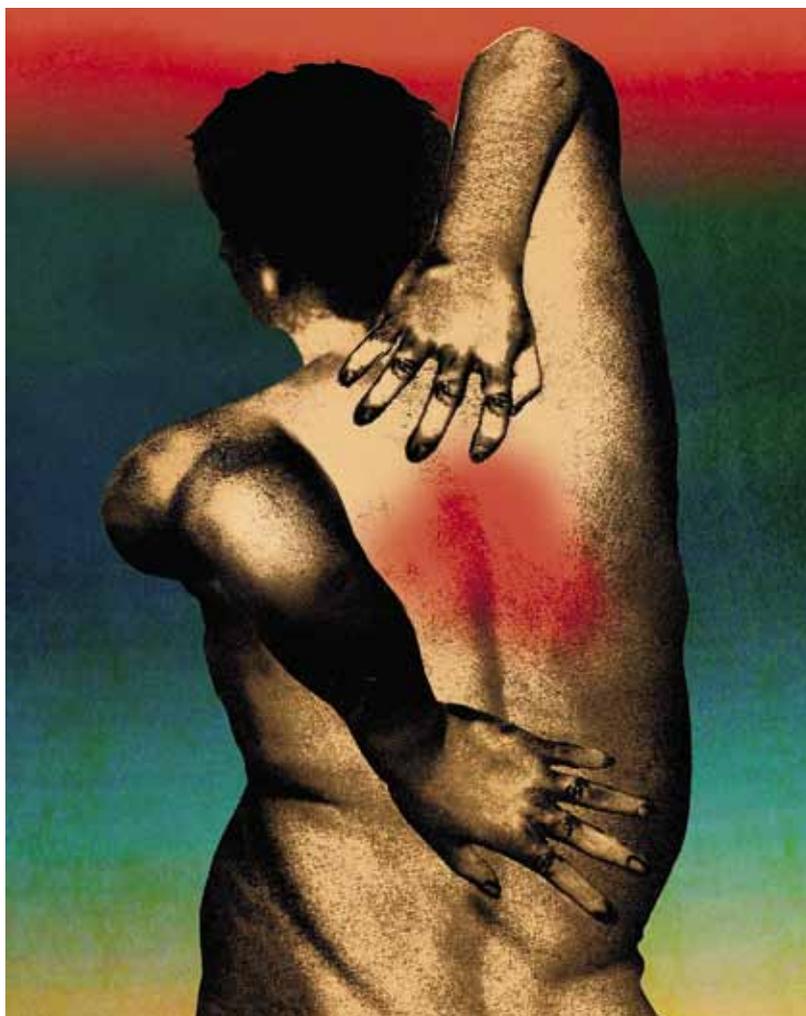
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IN TREATMENT

Oh, My Aching Back?

Dr. Peter Wehling, a molecular orthopedist in Düsseldorf, Germany, says he's found a revolutionary way to eliminate chronic pain—and he has the patients to prove it. Judith Newman investigates.



Marianne Boesky was, in a word, desperate. The owner of the eponymous Manhattan art gallery, she was diagnosed three years ago with arthritis and spinal degeneration that left her in almost constant pain. She couldn't sleep. She couldn't tie her shoes. Exercise and acupuncture would provide a few hours of relief, but then her back would seize up again. She didn't want surgery or

cortisone shots, because friends who'd tried these methods didn't have long-term success. "Every waking minute demanded a certain amount of energy to manage the pain," says Boesky, 44. At a certain point, she thought this might just be the way she'd have to live her life.

Then, among her privileged circle, she began to hear about Peter Wehling, an unassuming, bespectacled orthopedic surgeon in Düsseldorf, Germany. He

had a new treatment—nothing grand, terribly weird or spa-like. Dubbed the Regenokine Injection System, it consisted of manipulating your blood and reinjecting it over the course of a few weeks. And it worked.

"Very serious people, people who don't take health lightly, could not believe how much Wehling had reduced their symptoms," Boesky says. "I am not a medical adventurer. In fact, I avoid doctors. But for this, I was

on the next plane to Düsseldorf."

About 50 million Americans have been diagnosed with arthritis, which can cause everything from mild stiffness to chronic discomfort to excruciating pain. Arthritis is essentially a disorder in which the wear and tear of life or injury causes joint inflammation. In youth the inflammation brings healing to the area, activating our immune system to rev up and repair; then the inflammation goes away. As we age, the inflammation is not so eager to exit and it begins to destroy the cartilage and soft tissue. It's a progressive disease; nobody wakes up one day and is fine again on their own. And it presents a staggering cost to the health system and the workplace: Arthritis is the number-one reason for medical disability in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

As our citizens become fatter, the number of arthritis cases grows, particularly for the back, knees and hips. For the most part, treatments address the symptoms: steroid shots to reduce swelling and, thus, pain when swollen tissue impinges on the nerves; hyaluronic-acid injections to act as a lubricant for stiff joints; and, of course, mountains and mountains of painkillers. But what if there was a treatment that could target the disease itself? That's what Wehling hoped to find.

And many say he has. He's had a stellar list of patients, including Boesky, Tom Freston, Kobe Bryant, Alex Rodriguez (on

a referral from Kobe), pro golfer Fred Couples, Nick Nolte, a Saudi prince...and the late Pope John Paul II. It was common knowledge that the pope had Parkinson's in his later years, but few knew he was also in terrible pain from arthritis. "He could no longer get on his knees to pray," Wehling says over breakfast at the Palm Court in New York's Plaza Hotel, where he recently stayed while promoting his new e-book, *The End of Pain* (end-of-pain.com, 2011).

Wehling was a young spinal surgeon in Düsseldorf in the 1980s when he began to wonder: Why is it that some patients with disc prolapses (bulging or misalignment of the cartilaginous tissue between vertebrae) experienced little pain while patients with not much wrong in the structure of their spines could be in agony? And why did steroids—anti-inflammatory agents—give such quick, if temporary, relief? "If spine or osteoarthritis pain was caused mostly by mechanical problems, well, those problems wouldn't change after an hour or so," he says. "And they wouldn't change from the steroids."

Wehling became convinced that inflammation played a more important role in arthritis than anyone knew and began experimenting with rats to examine the effect of inflammation on the development of pain on the sciatic nerve. He also came to the States in 1987 to study with British scientist Christopher Evans. Now a professor of orthopedics at Harvard Medical School, Evans was then at the University of Pittsburgh, where he and his team were studying the molecules responsible for inflammation.

Here's the idea: The body has its own cell-repair system, and these cells contain anti-inflammatory proteins. Wehling

found a way to boost those cells and their anti-inflammatory proteins about 140-fold. He draws out about 50 milliliters of the patient's blood—approximately a shot-glass full—and incubates it for 20 to 28 hours with a special system he has patented. The blood serum is then centrifuged, frozen into vials and put in syringes. Over the next three weeks, the patient comes in twice

"I am not a medical adventurer. In fact, I avoid doctors. But with this pain, I was on the next plane to Düsseldorf," says art dealer Marianne Boesky.

a week and has a syringe of his/her own blood serum injected back into the affected area. Total cost: \$600 to \$1,500 per shot per joint, depending on the area and number of joints treated. "The point here is to treat the underlying disease, not just the symptoms," Wehling explains.

How many people feel relief? While reports on pain are highly subjective, patients describe about a 75 percent to 80 percent improvement—and this climbs higher if they make certain lifestyle changes. In Los Angeles, for example, Wehling treats patients in conjunction with Christopher Renna, M.D., an osteopathic physician and preventive medicine specialist who runs an integrative practice. Renna himself has had the treatment on his knees, hip and shoulder, and saw such relief that he asked to offer Regenokine at his clinic. "For his patients, there's a very high responder rate—around 90 percent," says Wehling. These clients also follow a personalized health program of exercise, good nutrition to reduce weight and sound sleep, which is hugely important because it inhibits inflammation.

Tom Freston was an otherwise healthy 65-year-old when, last year, he began feeling the agonizing pain of sciatica down his left side. The former CEO of Viacom, who now consults for media companies all over the world, was to leave for Afghanistan, but he was hobbling around on a cane. He ran into Hollywood superagent Ari Emanuel, who took one look

at him and said, "You've got to go to Düsseldorf."

Freston was experiencing such discomfort, that's exactly what he did, making an appointment with Wehling and receiving a series of shots in his back over five days. "On day two, the electrical pulsing in my leg was gone—gone," he says. "I returned to the States, got into a physical-therapy program and I've felt completely normal since I came back, last March. I tell you, I would have done anything to be

out of the pain I was in. Doctors here are so skeptical." When Freston told Emanuel how well the treatment had worked, he said, "Tell my brother"—who is Ezekiel Emanuel, the bioethicist, oncologist and medical adviser to President Obama. "Must be the placebo effect," Ezekiel said.

Well, no. While the placebo effect is, in fact, a real thing, several studies of Wehling's program suggest the treatment is working. In a 2008 study published in *Osteoarthritis and Cartilage* (an independent study, though funded by Wehling's small biotech company, Orthogen), 376 patients were given either placebo shots (saline), hyaluronic acid or Orthokine injections, Wehling's first-generation Regenokine. Every injection type had about the same (tiny) amount of adverse side effects, and everyone indicated some relief, even those getting the placebo—pain patients are nothing if not suggestible.

But in the group treated with Orthokine, 67 percent of patients had a greater than 50 percent reduction of pain after six months, compared to only 32 percent and 33 percent of those treated with hyaluronic acid and the placebo, respectively. **CONTINUED »**

Can It Eliminate Wrinkles?

Dermatologists who hear about Peter Wehling's success in boosting the anti-inflammatory factors in a patient's own blood are curious—and hopeful. That's because inflammation—the activation of the immune system in response to infection, irritation or injury—is implicated in just about every skin ailment imaginable, including premature aging.

"Wrinkles and inflammation, inflammation and wrinkles...they go together like love and marriage," says Santa Monica dermatologist Ava Shamban, M.D., author of *Heal Your Skin: The Breakthrough Plan for Renewal* (Wiley, 2011). "Studies have shown that UV radiation creates free radicals in the skin, which then creates inflammation, starting a cascade ending in collagen breakdown and textural changes associated with a prematurely aged appearance. In fact, recent studies have shown that UV radiation stimulates the production of IL-1 and inflammatory cytokine, which breaks down fat in the face, creating wrinkles and folds. Smoking and even diabetes have the same effect, as high blood-sugar levels create inflammation." While Wehling hasn't investigated his technique's potential anti-wrinkle properties just yet, he says he hopes to find more uses. And Shamban thinks he's onto something: "I feel his technique could lead to an important procedure in our aesthetic future." —**J.N.**

Since 2008 the treatment has become more sophisticated, because Wehling discovered he can predict who will respond based on studying patients' DNA. "There are about 40 genes involved in predicting who will develop arthritis," Wehling says. "While this is not fully understood, we've tested the good and bad responders and found that there are similarities in their gene sequences. There are similarities in those who respond best to other treatments—hyaluronic acid, for example. Even those who respond best to placebos have strong similarities in their gene sequencing."

"I've been following this story for years, and I have to say it surprised me that it worked," says Evans. "No matter how anti-inflammatory the incubated blood serum was, I didn't think such a short series of injections would have a lasting effect. But Peter's been working on this since the early '90s, and there are patients who have been pain-free for years." Evans is on the board of Wehling's Orthogen and has some stock, but does not receive money for being a board member.

"It's an interesting concept," says prominent rheumatologist Grace Wright, M.D., a clinical associate professor of medicine at NYU Langone Medical Center, when I ask her opinion on Regenokine's healing potential.

"Quite a bit is known about the inflammatory mediators released into serum when an animal or a human is exposed to infection or inflammation. The immune cells will release both inflammatory and anti-inflammatory chemicals into the blood, depending on the individual and the disease. What

crippling pain that just goes away—there is an enormous emotional component to pain, and also the feelings of faith and affection for one's doctor can be critical. (Case in point: There has been a study showing that chiropractic is no more helpful than massage, yet people love

Consider the millions that are at stake for them. If the treatment hurts them further, they have more to lose than the rest of us.

Regenokine is not yet approved by the FDA, and testing is extremely expensive in the United States. Plus, any deep-pocketed pharmaceutical company that might be interested wants a treatment that's off-the-shelf—maybe a single injection, not a series. But in Europe there are about 150 physicians who offer Regenokine and about 60,000 people who have been treated. Wehling has trained some doctors in New York and L.A. (see "The Details").

A lack of FDA approval certainly wouldn't stop someone like Boesky, who today calls Regenokine "life altering." And it's not only because, by her own estimation, she's about 80 percent free of pain. "On day three, I was walking around Düsseldorf and had the odd sense that I could see better. But it wasn't that my vision had improved. I realized my back wasn't killing me and I hadn't woken up with searing pain every time I turned over. I'd had a good night's sleep." And that was the huge bonus from the treatment: "Mental clarity," she says. "You never know how much of your mental energy is devoted to dealing with the pain." Well, Boesky knew. She'd lost her mind—and now she has it back. ■

Wehling's patients report a 75 percent to 80 percent improvement in pain relief.

is not clear is whether Wehling's approach can separate between these two and select patients who would receive only the anti-inflammatory benefits. So a large-scale trial might not yield significant benefits."

I've spent many years reporting on "miraculous" beauty and medical treatments, so when I had first heard about Wehling's approach, I was more than a little skeptical—and still am. The 2008 study, while independent, was funded partially by Orthogen; the number of patients in the study was relatively small, and the tests were not truly double-blind—that is, doctors who administered the medication were unmasked and the substances injected had differences in viscosity and color. Moreover, it's a well-known fact in medicine that people can have

their chiropractors and continue to see them.)

But Wehling is hardly a pitchman; he is circumspect and very reluctant to oversell his results. He is quick to say that this is not a miracle cure, and that it's also not a permanent solution for everyone. "But we've seen patients able to delay hip or knee surgery for six or seven years—and some have not needed it at all." When Nolte came to Wehling, he had end-stage osteoarthritis in both knees. There was a movie he wanted to do, but knew it would be impossible. He got Regenokine and filmed the movie. He's managed to delay surgery in one knee for several years, and the other knee is still fine.

And then there is the simple fact that a number of world-class athletes, like Rodriguez and Bryant, have found relief and have been willing to talk about it.

The Details: How to Get Regenokine Injection Therapy

To make an appointment with **PETER WEHLING**, call 49-211/602-5522. His private group practice is located on the ground floor of the Stadttor Building in Düsseldorf, Germany.

For more details, go to wehling-hartmann.de. If Düsseldorf is too far, there are two U.S. doctors Wehling has trained to perform his procedure, which has not yet received FDA approval.

CHRISTOPHER RENNA, M.D.
An osteopathic physician and specialist in preventive medicine, Renna runs LifeSpan medicine clinic in California. At 2811 Wilshire Blvd., Ste.

610, Santa Monica; 310-453-2335; lifespansmedicine.com.

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