

Dr. Riber at Palmetto Pain Management offers an “elegantly simple” way to handle chronic head pain

By: Emily Folsom Fernandez

Dr. Ezra B. Riber at Palmetto Pain Management has a magnetic level of positive energy. When I met with him to discuss the new treatment he champions for head pain relief I could tell that the love he has for his career and his patients fuels that energy. A board certified anesthesiologist with fellowship training in pain management, Riber has practiced in South Carolina for twenty five years. When I told him that I wanted to write an article that would announce this “elegantly simple” new procedure, as he describes it, to all of Columbia, his eyes lit up at the possibility of helping more people. This excitement was immediately followed by Dr. Riber imploring me to not tell his wife who “really wants me to slow down”. After spending just an hour with him I can tell that slowing down is probably a rare occurrence.

Migraine sufferers and those living with atypical facial pain or cluster headaches have long bounced around between treatments. Invasive procedures and prescriptions with varying levels of success have all been employed. The procedure that Dr. Riber performs on patients is non-invasive and has a high success rate. Patients drive themselves to and from the appointment and are usually fine to return to work that same day.

On the day I went to visit Dr. Riber one of his patients was kind enough to let me watch the procedure. The patient has lived for years with persistent cervicogenic headaches resulting from neck problems. They have tried a few other methods with only moderate success. As Dr. Riber continued to experience such high success rates with this new procedure he decided this would be their next attempt at treatment.

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The patient lay down on an examining table and Dr. Riber used a nasal anesthetic to numb the nose. A thin, flexible plastic utensil with an inner catheter was placed about half-way up the nostril. It was used to deliver a dye that accurately identified (using fluoroscopy which is a real time x-ray) the nerve bundle behind the nose, the sphenopalatine ganglion, which would be targeted. Next, the same utensil delivered the potent local anesthetic. The process was then repeated on the second nostril. It was just as fast as it sounds. The patient was finished within twenty minutes and the biggest complaint was a bitter taste on the back of his throat (a result of the post nasal drip from the anesthetic).

Dr. Riber describes the treatment as similar to rebooting a computer. The process wipes out the nerve memory. It stops the pattern of pain the nerve was emitting. He is reluctant to point to numbers for success because of how unrealistically high the success rate would seem. Dr. Riber says that in the majority of cases so far it has significantly reduced or completely eradicated the pain. A small number of patients have had repeat treatments. His excitement over the success of this procedure and the utter simplicity all circles around his concern for his patients and the “amount of conscious energy” that persistent pain monopolizes. Dr. Riber is dedicated to improving the quality of his patients’ lives and he is understandably excited about this recent opportunity in healthcare, “I truly believe that this simple device is going to revolutionize the way different types of headaches and facial pain, such as trigeminal neuralgia, will be treated.” +