



EVAN SEAL PHOTOS / THE LEADER

Dr. Sujith Dandina uses long needles with electrical tips to destroy specific nerves in a patient's back at the Pain Management Clinic at SMH.

by Boaz Joseph

**F**or the first time in years, André Arseneau can freely walk around, do gardening, even sleep for five hours at a time without being subjected to debilitating back pain.

Barely able to contain his emotions, the 46-year-old almost laughs saying he's happy to have sore muscles because he can exercise.

"Right now, I should be on my hands and knees," says the Surrey father of two during a visit to the Pain Management Clinic at Surrey Memorial Hospital (SMH).

For the last 15 years, following an accident while working at a bakery, Arseneau was, for weeks at a time, almost unable to function due to pinched nerves around his spine.

"When a nerve is pinching, it's like getting stabbed. It's so severe that it freezes you."

Doctors were of little help, mainly prescribing pain medication.

"They can't quantify that pain," Arseneau explains. "They can't point directly to a picture of a broken bone or a snapped something and say, 'This is where your pain is coming from.' I (once) had a doctor tell me, 'The pain is in your head.'"

His saviour was nurse practitioner Ruth Ringland at SMH's Pain Management Clinic, who suggested he wait for a new piece of equipment that was scheduled to arrive over the summer.

On Aug. 30, Arseneau became the first patient at SMH to undergo treatment with the hospital's new radio-frequency lesioning machine.

Part of a new \$59,000 gift from the Mr. and Mrs. P.A. Woodward Foundation, the machine, about the size of a toaster oven, has turned Arseneau's life around.

The first step was to make sure he was compatible, as it's not a cure-all for all types of back pain.

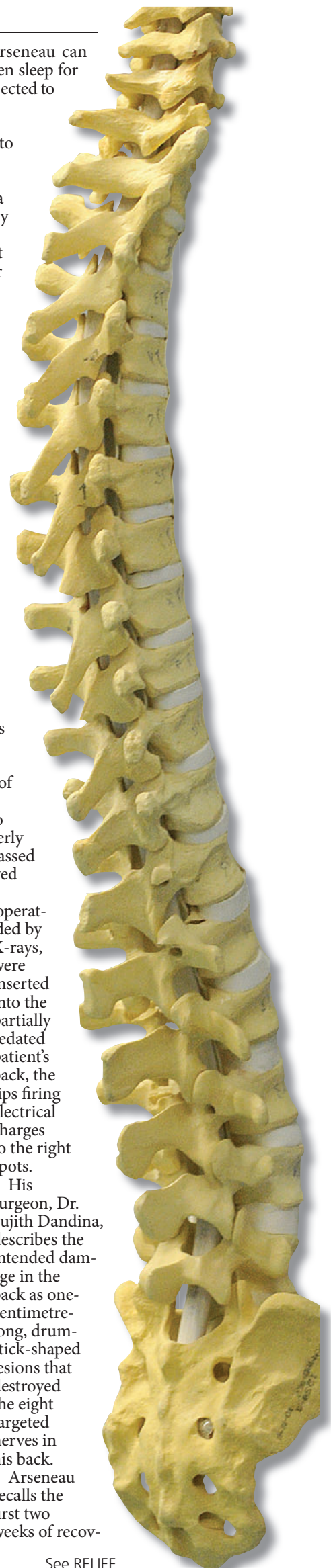
In two four-hour sessions, he was tested to see if nerve blocking medicine worked properly around the right nerves near his spine. He passed the tests, sensing much less pain and improved mobility.

Then the real treatment took place in the operating room, where 10-centimetre needles, guided by X-rays,

were inserted into the partially sedated patient's back, the tips firing electrical charges to the right spots.

His surgeon, Dr. Sujith Dandina, describes the intended damage in the back as one-centimetre-long, drumstick-shaped lesions that destroyed the eight targeted nerves in his back.

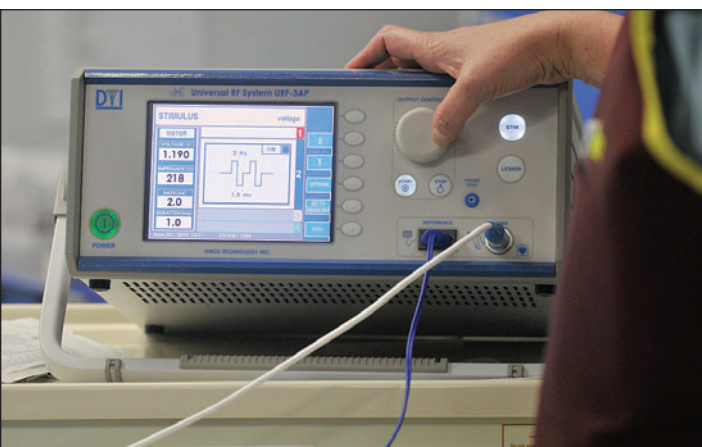
Arseneau recalls the first two weeks of recovery.



# Back in good form

## André Arseneau, tells of how a new radio-frequency lesioning machine at Surrey Memorial Hospital turned his life around

André Arseneau was virtually debilitated by a workplace back injury until treated by a radio-frequency lesioning machine at Surrey Memorial Hospital.



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ery as brutal – the procedure was, after all, a searing of the nerves near his spine.

Then the pain subsided. “Once it heals, it stops sending signals for some reason,” says Arseneau.

Within a few weeks, he felt less pain than with all of the pain-killers he’d taken over the years.

He felt normal, although weak – he will still need months or years of physiotherapy to get his strength back.

“My left side was my worst, now I feel absolutely nothing. Just sore muscles. Seriously, right now, I’ve been given a whole new life. I would do it (again) in the drop of a hat.”

Arseneau jokes that he’d like to see Dr. Dandina cloned.

“The group of people here are amazing. Absolutely amazing.”

Arseneau’s medical team has advised him that since the lesioned nerves will regenerate, the pain relief will likely be temporary – perhaps six months to two years, after which, the procedure will have to be repeated.

“Over 300,000 people within Fraser Health suffer from chronic pain and 21 per cent of ER visits are related to chronic pain,” says SMH Pain Management Clinic director Dr. Brenda Lau. “The radio-frequency lesioning

machine will improve access to much-needed minimally invasive interventional pain services.”

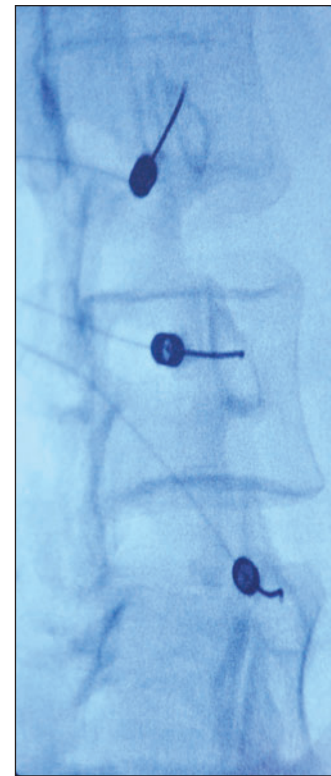
An estimated 100-300 people annually will be able to benefit from the new procedure at SMH.

Prospective patients are advised to talk to their doctors before contacting the Pain Management Clinic.

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**An X-ray of the needles near the spine.**