

**Week four of a great Herald series:**

# **Smokers are turning to Star Wars-style therapy for help**

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**NICOTINE** patches were not a patch on the real thing, nicotine gum was too chewy, will-power never stood a chance . . . so how on earth do you stop smoking?

For twenty members of staff at Stobhill NHS Trust the answer is simple - laser therapy.

Twenty long-term smokers joined up for a programme of laser therapy at the hospital at the beginning of December last year, and amazingly all 20 have quit.

But committed smokers like myself have an a knack of either ignoring statistics like this, or believing it couldn't work on them.

With this scepticism in mind I bought a packet of twenty on the way to see therapist, Sandra Shanks, at her centre in Kirkintilloch.

## **CRAVINGS**

As I sat in the world's most comfortable chair and donned super cool shades that turned the world green, Sandra explained the theory of laser therapy.

"It's all about endorphins," she said as a beeping noise indicated the start of the therapy.

"Endorphins are the natural body chemicals that have a calming, relaxing effect and nicotine increases the level of endorphins in the body.

"So when you stop smoking, the sudden drop in endorphin levels leads to withdrawal



symptoms and cravings."

That's apparently where the laser therapy gets involved.

Laser therapy is what you end up with when you mix the ancient healing art of acupuncture with star wars.

A soft laser beam is used to stimulate energy points on the ear, nose and wrist of the patient, who feels nothing except pleasurable relaxation.

The first session lasts about 45 minutes and everyone has a booster.

For some that is enough to quit smoking for good, but for others there other 15 minute 'booster' sessions to kick start the endorphin flow again.

## **VALID**

Sandra (34), explained: "Some people need more than one booster to finally quit but the vast majority do stop and there is no better feeling than seeing someone's joy at finally quitting."

The therapy is part of

the hospital's long term plan of creating a health promoting hospital which involves not just the patients but also the staff.

All the treatments are available to the staff at the moment and therapist of all kinds are lobbying at the moment to get the treatments available on the NHS.

At present the treatment is available to the public from private therapists like Sandra, but she believes it is only a matter of time before it is accepted as a valid treatment for smokers.

## **REFRESHED**

She said: "Although the therapy is still in its infancy, all the evidence indicates that it works.

"One of the main points of this treatment is that people have to want to give up, and at least be a little determined to give it a go.

Before too long the session was over and I emerged from my green world feeling refreshed and pleasantly light headed.

Sandra told me: "There is a naturally good feeling from the therapy because it is stimulating the endorphin levels, these help people deal with the low feeling that accompanies quitting smoking."

Sandra walked me to the door at the end of the session and I bounced out into the freezing wind smiling because, despite my scepticism, I had no desire for a cigarette.

Three days later I had a booster session, I hadn't actually wanted to smoke in the previous three days, but I wanted another session because it felt so good.

It's been a week now and still no cigarettes. There are minor cravings but nothing as severe as I had first imagined, so it would seem that the lasers hit the spot.

The packet of twenty is still unopened and with luck - and an occasional endorphin zap - it will stay that way.