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Yielding to the light

Center helping many extinguish innermost cravings

The Norman Transcript

By Randall Turk

Transcript Business Editor

For 10 years, John Barker was a college mathematics professor dedicated to helping young people make something from their lives.

But he hated himself.

He knew he was an addict. Worse, he knew many of his students, his friends and associates shared his fatal addiction.

"One day, I drove to Dallas and got the cure," he said. "Unlike many times before, it wasn't temporary. I didn't just stop at the stop sign. I parked the car and got out."

Barker said he realized his life had been going up in smoke. A two pack a day cigarette smoker, he was frightened by the fatal numbers involved in his habit. He knew smoking kills 6,000 Oklahomans a year. Yet like many other smokers, his rational judgment had been no match for nicotine's insidious grip.

Barker's success in quitting the smoking habit led him to a new career in helping others. Today, he owns and operates the Anne Penman Laser Therapy Center in Norman. The center, which also provides a weight reduction program, employs laser treatment, individual counseling and follow-up to produce a phenomenal rate of success.

Barker said the nicotine patch and nicotine gum each result in a successful quitting rate of only 10 percent. As reported on "Good Morning America" in August, the Ann Penman method

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has a success rate of 64 percent. Over the past 13 years, he said, Penman Centers have helped more than 30,000 smokers quit the habit. The method involves the use of a non-invasive low intensity laser.

How could laser light applied to the skin help to reverse the craving for nicotine going on deep within the lungs and in the brain? The answer involves "endorphins," chemicals released in the pleasure center of the brain each time a smoker lights up.

"A smoker's endorphins are at extremes all day long," Barker said. "A smoker knows when he's 'in the valley' and has to light up again. The laser returns the body's endorphins to their natural state. It boosts and balances the body's endorphins, helping to reduce the endorphin crash and eliminating the need for a cigarette. That helps a person eliminate the want."

The Norman center provides three laser treatments, each 30 minutes to an hour in duration. The treatments are spaced 48 hours apart. Barker said the laser treatments, extremely relaxing, greatly reduce the withdrawal symptoms associated with quitting tobacco.

"The laser is only part of the treatment," he said. "We approach this from a personal perspective. Each client is psychologically different. You can't focus in on one area and ignore the individual."

Barker said it is important to get to know the client and the "triggers" that cause the individual to relapse into smoking. "We're all expert [smoking] quitters and experts at starting up again," he said. "We emphasize with clients they are never cured, just one step ahead of the smoking habit." It is a point Anne Penman has emphasized for years.

April 19, 1991, Penman quit her 60-cigarette-a-day habit and has been smoke-free since. After a "wake-up call" from her husband's heart attack and surgery, she was determined not only to quit smoking, but help others do the same.

Penman became a laser therapist and in 1992 developed the first Anne Penman stop-smoking center in Glasgow, Scotland. She also created relationships with the corporate sector, hospitals and medical centers. She has trained technicians throughout Europe.

In January of last year Penman opened her first U.S. center in Atlanta. She plans to open another 100 centers over the coming year. She will be in Norman Thursday for the grand opening of the Anne Penman Center, the first in Oklahoma.

Barker said the program includes thorough education about addictive behavior. "Even though the physical withdrawal is

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minimized, the psychological factors of addiction are still there," he said.

The center also maintains a 24-hour hotline clients can call and reach "a real live person" in times of crisis or temptation. Some may feel the need for reinforcement, even after quitting for some length of time, Barker said. The center offers a maintenance program involving a laser treatment once a month until the client is confident the addiction is gone.

As with other programs, some will fail this one, Barker said. "The people who fail usually undergo just one laser session and then try to quit on their own," he said.

The center's stop smoking program costs \$275 to complete. That amounts to giving up about 10 weeks' worth of smoking a pack a day in exchange for a lifetime of restored health.

"We help our clients gain their perspective again," Barker said... "This is one of the toughest games anyone will ever play. It could be the biggest achievement of your life."



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