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## Firm has the nerve to help

### SCI-TECH SCENE | 'Research says what's good for elite athletes can be good for aging adults'

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BY [SANDRA GUY](#) Sun-Times Columnist

Josephine Babos was admitted to a hospital for chest pains this fall, and ended up having her colon removed, undergoing kidney dialysis, being put on a feeding tube and losing her muscle strength.

Despite the enormous setbacks, the 76-year-old Aurora native refused to give up.

"Don't tell me I can't do something," she said.

Babos improved enough to function on her own, but she was transferred to the Lakewood Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in southwest suburban Plainfield to get back on her feet.

She's now able to stand and walk 100 feet -- the result of help from electrical stimulation treatments similar to those given professional athletes who get injured.

The treatments, known as PENS, or patterned electrical neuromuscular stimulation, replicate the normal nerve and muscle firing order that a person had before being injured or diseased.

The Cubs and Blackhawks use similar therapies.

"In simple terms, PENS reminds the muscles and nerves how they're supposed to work together, while helping to strengthen muscles and manage pain," said Tony Taylor, chief marketing officer for Accelerated Care Plus (ACP), a Reno, Nev.-based company that holds the patent on PENS technology. Dr. Frank Palermo, ACP's medical director, along with co-founders CEO John Beach and chief scientist Chris Castel, a former director of the neurologic division of Niles-based Medical Research Labs, realized that the technology could be used successfully with the burgeoning number of aging baby boomers.

"Research says what's good for elite athletes can be good for aging adults," Taylor said. "Many of the same things that inhibit athletes' recovery apply to aging adults. If someone has a great deal of pain, it's often difficult to withstand physical therapy."

The 15-year-old company charges \$950 to \$1,150 a month to nearly 3,000 nursing homes nationwide, based on the size of the chain, including 100 in the Chicago area. The clinical programs include the PENS equipment and three other therapeutic modality devices. The company also trains therapists in using the equipment and developing clinical programs. Besides PENS, the other devices provide electrical stimulation, therapeutic ultrasound and shortwave pulsed diathermy.

"Our clinical programs include advanced training for therapists on a variety of conditions, ranging from arthritis to urinary incontinence to slow-healing wounds," said Taylor.

Nursing homes caught in a squeeze of government regulations and cost pressures get reimbursed by Medicare and most insurance companies for the therapies. The nursing homes also can tout the services in their marketing.

Families are paying attention, comparing quality of care via Web sites such as *Nursinghomecompare.com*, *ElderCareLink.com* and *APlaceforMom.com*, and insisting on seeing more clinical services and quicker improvements.

Karen Homer, therapy program manager at Lakewood, said therapists there are excited about the new program, launched Oct. 29, because they improve their skills and feel empowered when they see patients improve.

"We have a doctor's weekly input, ongoing advanced training, and staff and patient meetings in a structured way," said Homer, a 10-year therapist. Homer saw a woman who had suffered chronic swelling in her arm for more than 30 years after a mastectomy be free of pain after five diathermy treatments.

"We started by treating her hand, and then moved down her arm," she said.

Skeptics caution that the treatments are best used as an adjunct to therapeutic exercise, and should not be seen as cures in themselves.

Scott Fonda, a chiropractic physician at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, said the trend is toward having patients do more active therapy.

"You use the [other therapies] as a catalyst," he said.

Meanwhile, Babos is expected to go home in four to six weeks, after she has extended her walks from 100 feet to 150 to 200 feet.