

# a touch of tranquility

Story by Angie Ardolf  
Photos by Robin Alam

A patient enjoys a massage given by Geery, who is trained in the Ben Benjamin method of orthopedic massage.

## Manual therapy and a soothing atmosphere align at Physical Sciences Institute

Ivan Huergo's approach to physical therapy is anything but typical. His Willowbrook, Ill., facility, Physical Sciences Institute (PSI), is the realization of a unique philosophy developed through years of education and hands-on experience.

Huergo's nontraditional treatment philosophy is based on a tissue-specific framework, which assumes that musculoskeletal or orthopedic injuries involve any one or many of the following structures: joint, muscle, nerve and/or connective tissue. Each structure is analyzed and the affected areas are treated using a variety of manual therapy techniques to ensure a successful, long-lasting outcome.

The only physical therapist in Illinois certified in both Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapy (OMPT) and Muscle Activation Techniques™ (MAT), Huergo, MPT, MATcs, has found that his unique approach works well for patients who've hit roadblocks with traditional forms of physical therapy. "When a patient goes through treatment with my team, he or she is usually very surprised at how different the experience is from previous physical therapy or other forms of treatment," he said. "Most of the time our patient reports definitive improvement, such as 30% in four visits or 50% in six visits; whereas, they weren't able to definitively say if they had improved in the past."

### Analysis + Education + Treatment + Wellness

Huergo's interest in physical therapy developed as a result of five knee injuries requiring physical therapy as a high school and collegiate wrestler. His extensive educational background includes a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Sciences from the University of Oklahoma and a Master of Physical Therapy degree from Northwestern University Medical School. He went on to complete an American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) credentialed residency in OMPT through the Manual Therapy Institute (MTI) and became a certified specialist in MAT. He credits the co-directors of MTI, Pieter Kroon, PT, OCS, FAAOMPT, and Tim Kruchowsky, PT, OCS, FAAOMPT, for guiding him along the path of lifelong learning. "I have been fortunate to have great teachers from multiple manual-based backgrounds," Huergo says.

Over the years, Huergo had the opportunity to work in many different clinical settings, but he always wanted to create a practice of his own. "I always felt like things could be done a little better," Huergo said. "In all these work experiences, I kept track of where things could improve and that's how I came up with the concept of PSI."

PSI's holistic healing process includes four critical elements: Analysis + Education + Treatment + Wellness. Huergo looks to his highly trained staff – Chief Financial Officer Andrew Anderson; Massage Therapy Director Debra Geery, LMT; Personal Training Director Robin Alam, MATcs, NASM-PES; Dave Czarnecki, PTA; and Office

Manager Lisa Sharpsteen – for help in carrying out his vision. "I have a really strong team of professionals who strive toward the marriage of clinical expertise and superior customer service," he said.

### One step at a time

The first step of PSI's healing process is analysis, which involves evaluating the patient to determine which structure – joint, muscle, nerve or connective tissue – is compromised. Since there is usually more than one, Huergo prioritizes accordingly and then utilizes a variety of manual approaches and techniques to solve orthopedic problems.

Once the compromised structures are identified, Huergo works to educate the patient on the specifics of their injury, often using a skeletal model as a visual aid. "Research suggests that if the patient understands the orthopedic problem, they have a better shot of achieving greater success," he said.

Treatment of the patient consists of a manual-based approach that is specifically tailored to treat the compromised structure, such as joint or soft tissue mobilization, muscular stabilization and neural flossing among many other techniques. During manual therapy, Huergo uses his hands to apply manual force to improve mobility in the structures that are restricted. For ligamentous problems, Huergo relies on Geery, who is trained in the Ben Benjamin method of orthopedic massage, to identify and treat the affected ligaments and tendons. >>



Czarnecki educates a patient on her injury using a skeletal model. Patient education has shown to increase treatment success.





A Japanese rock garden and trickling water fountain add to the clinic's soothing, Zen-like atmosphere.

"The clinic looks like a spa. It's very calming."

– Jason Markworth, Sammons Preston – Patterson Medical Sales Consultant

#### A healing environment

The fourth component of PSI's healing process is wellness, and patients experience it the moment they walk through the clinic's doors. Huergo created a relaxing, spa-like environment with décor in soothing green and light-brown earth tones. Soft music, hand-selected by Huergo, adds a unique ambiance. Wall murals of a bamboo forest and plum blossoms, a Japanese rock garden and a flowing water fountain create a Zen-like, therapeutic atmosphere.

A puzzle spread out on the reception area table adds a sense of community to the clinic. Staff and patients alike enjoy a team approach to problem solving – in fact, PSI patients often arrive early to put a few pieces of the puzzle together before appointments. "The wellness component is really all the little things that come together," Huergo said.

Another important component of wellness at PSI is superior customer service. Huergo's partner and PSI's Chief Financial Officer Andrew Anderson answers the phones, schedules appointments and makes patients comfortable from the moment they set foot in the clinic. Anderson brings to his position a wealth of customer service knowledge gleaned from years of experience as a director of operations of four fine dining restaurants in Chicago. "Andrew has no formal training in healthcare or medicine, but what he does have is experience in dealing with people and solving problems," said Huergo. "He is critical as our first point of contact."

#### Growing, organically

PSI opened its doors just two years ago and Huergo says the clinic continues to attract new patients. He attributes the success of PSI to its unique – and highly successful – approach to healing. Huergo relies strictly on word of mouth to attract

new patients. In fact, he has never marketed PSI's services and he's only received one physician referral since the clinic opened. His most common patient is a person who has heard about his clinic from three different people. "All of our patients are referred by word of mouth," he said. "If I treat a mother, she may refer a friend, one of her sons, or her husband all because of her positive experience. She wants to share that experience with other people. We haven't done any marketing – we've just done a good job with our patients."

Other healthcare professionals have taken notice of Huergo's successful techniques and have invited him to teach courses and give lectures. Recently, Huergo rolled out a manual-based continuing education curriculum at PSI. He partnered with colleagues to set up courses on a range of topics throughout 2009, from manual therapy for the thoracic cage to Muscle Energy Techniques (MET).

This spring, PSI's new satellite location will open in Wheaton, Ill. While the new facility is smaller than the flagship Willowbrook clinic, it is based on the same concept and will offer patients identical services. In the near future, Huergo also plans to open a satellite clinic in Chicago – and he says that probably won't be the last. "The company will grow at the pace of its extraordinary employees," he said.

For more information about Physical Sciences Institute and its continuing education schedule, visit [www.physicalsciencesinstitute.com](http://www.physicalsciencesinstitute.com).

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– Ivan Huergo, Clinical Director



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Asian-infused décor transforms the clinic into a tranquil oasis. Green and light-brown earth tones, rustic wood elements and a bamboo forest painted on the walls bring nature into the space.



## Manual therapy: An age-old hands-on approach

While manual therapy is a fairly new concept in the United States, the practice of hands-on healing and manipulation has roots as early as 400 B.C., when it was used by Hippocrates to heal various ailments. Throughout the centuries, manual therapy has been refined from a primitive practice to a scientific discipline.

The founding body of manual therapy for physical therapists in the United States is the American Academy of Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapists (AAOMPT), which was formed in 1991. AAOMPT defines manual therapy as a clinical approach utilizing skilled, specific hands-on techniques, including but not limited to manipulation and mobilization, used by the physical therapist to diagnose and treat soft tissues and joint structures for the purpose of modulating pain; increasing range of motion; reducing or eliminating soft tissue inflammation; inducing relaxation; improving contractile and noncontractile tissue repair, extensibility, and/or stability; facilitating movement; and improving function.

Huergo uses several manual therapy techniques to provide each patient with a personalized healing experience. "I've been open minded with my physical therapy training and I've been able to step back and take a wider look to analyze the orthopedic problem and step forward to decide which manual approach is best suited for that particular orthopedic problem," he said. "I may jump in and out of several manual approaches depending on how the patient presents."

All of the PSI staff members are trained, at some level, in a relatively new manual approach called Muscle Activation Techniques™ (MAT). The goal of MAT is to correct muscle imbalances by identifying the inhibited or weak muscles that are creating a protective response and then "jumpstarting" these muscles in order to improve their contractile capability. This helps to restore normal body alignment, and as a result, decrease pain and reduce the risk of injury.

While PSI's focus is manual therapy, Huergo and his team also employ physical therapy equipment to help patients heal sooner. Electric hi-lo tables offer positioning flexibility with an adjustable midsection as well as adjustable head and arm rests. An unweighting device is used on patients presenting with low back pain, stenosis, compression of the spine and total hip or knee replacements. This >>



device hydraulically lifts the patient and unweights 50-60 percent of their body weight, allowing the muscles to work with less gravitational force.

A Nautilus Freedom Trainer allows patients to build strength and replicate nearly any activity, from everyday motions to sport-specific activities. At the new Wheaton clinic, patients will have access to a Norwegian pulley machine that has an unweighting component. This allows the patient to progress slowly and add resistance in small increments.



## Facility Profile

Physical Sciences Institute  
 Flagship clinic: Willowbrook, Illinois  
 Satellite clinic: Wheaton, Illinois

### Primary Services

Physical therapy  
 Massage therapy  
 Muscle Activation Techniques™ (MAT)  
 Personal training  
 Continuing education

### Equipment

Dynatron Electric Stimulation/Ultrasound Unit  
 Chattanooga Hydrocollator  
 Nautilus Freedom Trainer  
 Landice treadmill  
 Nautilus weight bench  
 Armedica Hi-Lo Tables  
 Pneumex Pneu-Weight™ system



At PSI (from left): Dave Czarncki, PTA; Jason Markworth, Sammons Preston – Patterson Medical Sales Consultant; Andrew Anderson, RTS, CFO; Ivan Huergo, MPT, MATcs; Lisa Sharpsteen, Office Manager; Debra Geery, LMT; Robin Alam, MATcs, NASM-PES