Fibromyalgia symptoms can hurt patients, their marriages
Research shows chronic condition puts stress on spouses

By Terri Yablonsky Stat, Special to the Tribune; June 2, 2010

When Shari Ferbert's fibromyalgia symptoms kicked into high gear 12 years ago, her husband was caught off guard.

"It was like a left hook from nowhere," Dal Ferbert said. Doctors couldn't find anything wrong with the mother of two from Lake Forest, yet she had unrelenting pain in her back, neck and shoulder.

"I didn't understand fibromyalgia or what my wife was going through. It's a natural reaction to say, 'Come on, there's no way you feel as bad as you say you're feeling,'" Ferbert said, adding that a neurologist finally set him straight.

"He said, 'You can't see migraines, but they exist.' That was eye-opening for me," said Ferbert, 56, a vice president and general manager at Littelfuse Inc. He started going along on his wife's doctor visits so he could better understand how she feels.

According to a recent study, marriages can suffer when one spouse has fibromyalgia, a chronic condition marked by widespread body pain, tight muscles and poor sleep.

An estimated 3 million to 6 million Americans suffer from the condition, whose symptoms also include fatigue, depression, chronic headaches, joint pain, and cognitive and memory problems. Because medical tests can't find anything wrong, people are sometimes told it's all in their head.

In recent years, however, fibromyalgia has been gaining acceptance among the medical community and the public.

"People with fibromyalgia look OK but don't feel OK," said Dr. Robert Katz, rheumatologist at Rush University Medical Center. "That must be frustrating because you can't read your spouse. Some spouses are generous and understanding and some are skeptical about the whole thing."

Katz said patients should bring their spouses to doctor visits.

"Fibromyalgia puts a lot of pressure on spouses," said Katz. "It's helpful to bring the spouse to doctor's appointments. If you explain to them this is the intensity of their partner's pain, this is how weather and stress affects how they feel, most of the time they try to help."

The recent study by researchers at the University of Missouri at Columbia looked at 37 married couples in which one spouse had been diagnosed with fibromyalgia. Both spouses recorded diary entries about their marital interactions and personal feelings, said Christine Proulx, assistant professor of human development and family studies in the university's College of Human Environmental Sciences.
The study suggests there is a strong link between fibromyalgia, feelings of depression and fatigue. **Proulx found** that people with fibromyalgia were almost three times more depressed than their spouses and reported more anger and problems in the marriage, indicating that they were more likely to consider divorce than their spouses. The healthy spouses reported that it was difficult to watch their spouses experience pain.

**Proulx said** that in other research the gap was narrower.

"There's so much misunderstanding about the condition," said Proulx. "Therapists should consider the health histories of patients. Fibromyalgia is almost another member of the marriage and needs to be incorporated into treatment plans. It's also important to include the spouse in treatment decisions and to educate them on medication and its side effects."

Shari Ferbert said that sometimes "spouses might just think we're being lazy" or wonder why they can't contribute financially.

"I wouldn't be reliable enough to go back to work," said Ferbert, who previously worked as an office manager.

In 1999, Shari Ferbert started Advocates for Fibromyalgia Funding, Treatment, Education and Research, or AFFTER (affter.org). The nonprofit helps fund research and education toward a cure for fibromyalgia.

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Simple exercises for good health
Dr. Jay Adlersberg

NEW YORK (WABC) -- We frequently hear the advice to move and exercise if we want to do the best for our health.

Moving our bodies can mean stronger muscles and bones as well as stronger hearts and lungs. While regular exercise benefits, so can other once-in-a-while movements. The two movements that one could incorporate into good habits will specifically help two groups of people.

First, anyone who is tense during the day or who spends a day working. Second, anyone who is a person of a certain age -- an age when falling becomes a concern.

The benefits of yoga are well known. It builds strength, stretches muscles and calms the soul, but no need to wait for that class after work. You can do some yoga right at your desk, starting with something called a cat curl.

"Many times we sit all curled over like that. We put too much pressure on our back, so all a cat curl does is you look up and exhale and you roll through," Judi Bar explained.

Bar, a yoga therapist at the Cleveland Clinic, says office yoga can also be a helpful relief.

"The idea is to open the side of the body so we get more space in the lungs. The idea is always about getting more oxygen. Sitting up straight, using our core to hold us up -- so just take an arm and bend. If we don't want to use the arm we can just bend over one side and bend over the other," she said.

So for older people who may not be inclined to exercise, there is another helpful movement that they can consider. It's dancing.

Two recent studies of seniors by University of Missouri researchers found that seniors who participated in dance-based therapy improved balance, gait and overall functionality.

These improved movements can reduce a person's risk of falling.

"They did dance steps that were choreographed. And what they found was that with these individuals they actually had greater walking speed and they improved balance," Dr. Ronan Factora said.

Dr. Factora says it's not just dancing seniors can benefit from, but any regular mobility in their lives.

"Physical activity of any sort, even simple walking 30 minutes a day, four days a week, confers a lot of benefit for cardiovascular health and anything that is good for the heart is good for the brain," Factora said.

If doctors were to sell the best anti-aging medicine they had with a good guarantee of better health, they would call it moving or exercise.

The body is the vessel of health, so keeping it functioning as long as possible involves keeping it moving as long as possible. Even with these two simple, but helpful movements.
MU faces housing dilemma

Demand is up; stock is down.

By Janese Heavin

Tuesday, June 1, 2010

Students who just now are deciding they want to attend the University of Missouri might have to wait a bit before they know where they’ll be living this fall.

Campus housing is becoming limited as administrators deal with a record freshman enrollment coupled with the fact that more returning students want to continue living on campus.

“It’s good news,” said Cathy Scroggs, vice chancellor for student affairs. “We’re finding our returning students like living on campus. I think that’s certainly one of the issues. But we’re seeing more students wanting to come to MU, too.”

This fall, approximately 6,000 freshmen are expected to attend MU, an increase of about 300 students over the past two years.

Although most of the students who already have enrolled are under housing contracts, those who decide to come to MU after today will have to be patient as administrators try to find room for them, Scroggs said.

“Students coming after June 1, that will be the tipping point,” she said. “Late arrivals will have some challenges.”

The university’s priority is to house freshmen on campus or at least provide other options near campus.

But there will be two fewer residential halls to accommodate them. Cramer and Stafford halls, both located on Hitt Street, are scheduled to be demolished this summer to make room for underground utilities needed for the new MU Health Care patient-care tower, spokeswoman Mary Jenkins said. Gillett Hall on Virginia Street also will remain closed this coming school year for renovations.

Hudson Hall on Rollins Road is reopening in August after major renovations, but it won’t be enough to offset the loss of rooms. MU’s Department of Residential Life is again leasing space
from two private apartment complexes, Campus View off of South Providence Road and Campus Lodge on Old 63 South.

Known as Tiger Diggs and Mizzou Quads, respectively, the complexes are two miles from campus but popular among students because they provide apartment amenities such as kitchens and washers and dryers.

"We were hoping to only use one, but we need them both," Scroggs said. "It's a good problem to have."

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Bases of Columns to get minor makeover

By Janese Heavin

Tuesday, June 1, 2010

The bases that secure the University of Missouri’s iconic Columns are about to undergo some cosmetic surgery.

But don’t worry: The six columns salvaged from the fire that destroyed Academic Hall in 1892 are structurally sound, administrators stressed.

The project addresses some small cracks found in the concrete bases during an external analysis.

“The Columns are one of the university’s and the state’s greatest treasures,” Gary Ward, associate vice chancellor of Campus Facilities, said in a statement. “External experts completed an analysis and found no problems with the bases, but they did find hairline cracks. While these don’t pose any structural problems, they recommended that we address the cracks before they get worse.”

The current concrete bases of the Columns on Francis Quadrangle were placed in 1949 to protect the original stone bases.

This project will entail wrapping a fiber material around the blocks and sealing them with a thin layer of concrete, said Bob Unrath, assistant director for planning and design.

“Our goal is to protect the existing concrete from further cracking,” he said in the statement.

The project is expected to cost $178,371 and is funded by MU Campus Facilities Maintenance. Unrath estimated the work will take four to five weeks, during which time the area will be roped off.

The work should be done before freshmen arrive.