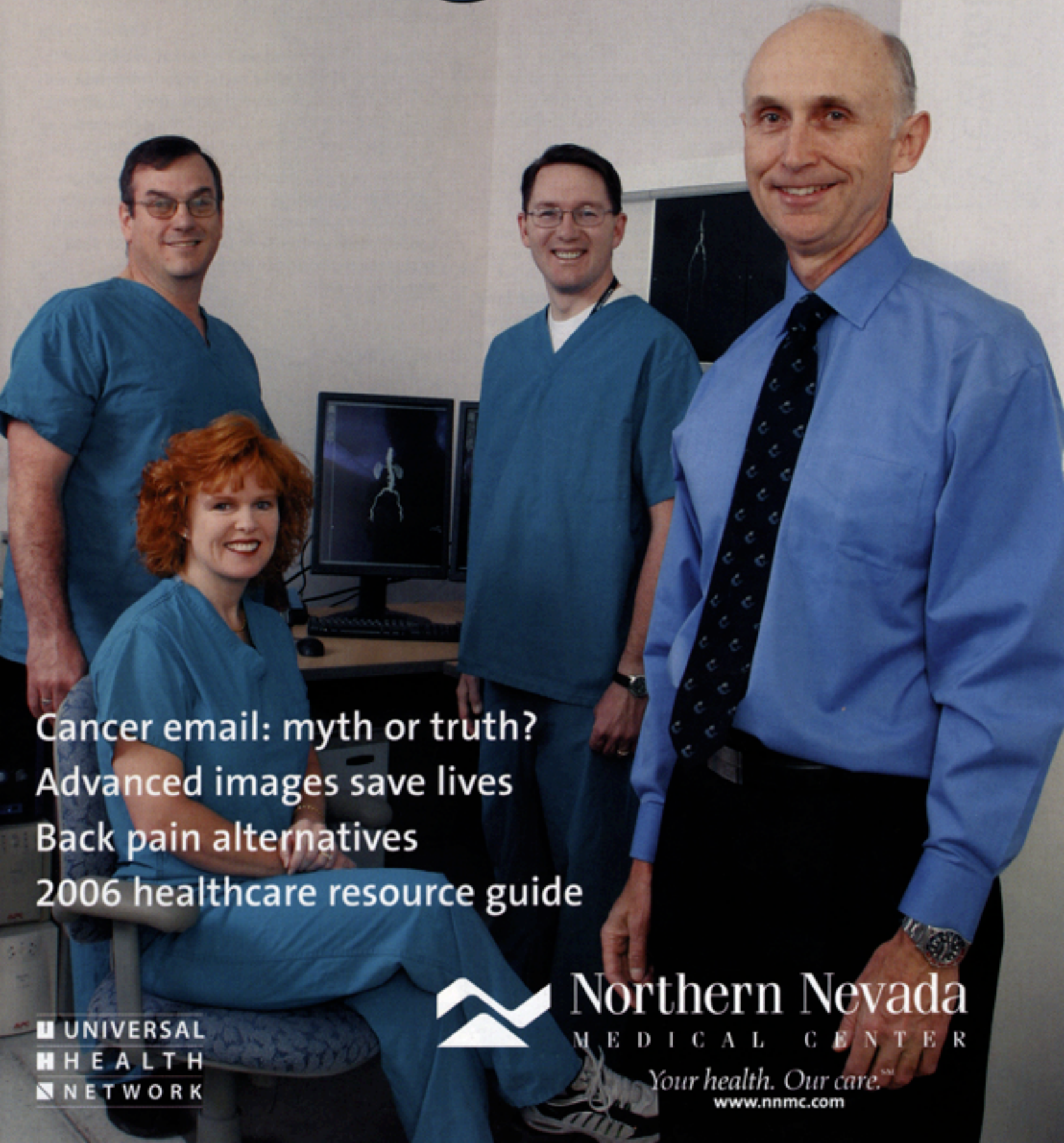


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# Physiatrists

provide nonsurgical alternatives for pain relief

By Betsy Mellinger

Dylan Lineback felt the start of his back pain three years ago at the age of 22. Within three years, the pain grew so intense, he no longer walked, but waddled.

"My back pain was so severe that I was virtually immobilized," said Lineback, a strapping 25-year-old. "I was looking to have surgery, and a friend recommended I seek treatment from a physiatrist to reduce my spinal inflammation prior to scheduling lumbar surgery."

Physiatrists are medical doctors who specialize in musculoskeletal medicine, physical medicine and rehabilitation. Physiatry, a nonsurgical specialty, began after World War II when veterans suffering from chronic pain sought relief from the lingering discomfort caused by their battle-inflicted injuries.

"Dylan's pain was not a result of a trauma or specific injury, but caused by years of lifting, turning and bending," said Lineback's physiatrist, Forrest Burke, MD. "His MRI showed a large central and right paracentral disk extrusion at his lumbar 4 and 5 disks."

In lay terms, a disk in Lineback's lower back was torn, and disk material was coming out like toothpaste from a crack in the tube. The disk rupture also caused severe narrowing of his spinal canal and inflammation of the nerves along his right side. Consequently, he suffered intense



*Forrest Burke, MD, works with patients to restore normal movement.*

and constant back pain, altering his gait and stance and creating unnatural weight distribution along his spine, hips and knees.

"Oftentimes in cases like Dylan's, the pain is not caused by the compression on the nerves, but by chemical radiculitis, or nerve inflammation," Dr. Burke said. "We initiated epidural steroid treatments, which reduced the inflammation around the spinal nerves and provided Dylan with tremendous relief."

Subsequent range of motion tests on Lineback following the epidural steroid treatments indicate that he has recovered 80 percent of his mobility; his pain has

almost disappeared and his gait has returned to normal.

"We treat many patients seeking relief from their back pain, and we look for nonoperative solutions for our patients," Dr. Burke said. "As a result, physiatrists have taken the lead in performing many of the more advanced, nonsurgical procedures to relieve pain."

Although Lineback may still require surgery, the relief and mobility provided by Dr. Burke's nonsurgical approach have given him time to enter a physical therapy program, enabling Lineback to strengthen his muscles and promote his recovery after surgery. By allowing his body to heal and tone, this therapy regime may even help Lineback avoid surgery.

Betsy Mellinger is volunteer and community relations coordinator at Northern Nevada Medical Center. Forrest Burke, MD, is speaking about low back pain at the Jan. 13 Healthy Lifestyles Series event; see page 11 for details. For more information regarding physiatry and nonsurgical alternatives for pain treatment, visit the website of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at [www.aapmr.org](http://www.aapmr.org), or call Dr. Burke at Silver State Spine Care, 331-2600.