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AGE IS JUST A NUMBER

Cenegenics helps patients live healthier lives

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When you meet Marian Murphy, you can't help but notice she glows. The easy-going mother of two girls, who raises Egyptian horses in Cheraw, gingerly sips her coffee and casually nibbles on a plate of fruit while waiting to be called for her appointment. She smiles at everyone who passes by.

"I'm just happy to be here," Murphy, 59, said while sitting in the waiting room of the Cenegenics office in Charleston. Quite literally, Murphy is happy to be here — meaning alive.



Above: Dr. Michale "Mickey" Barber in the Cenegenics Carolinas office in downtown Charleston.

Previous page: Marian Murphy awaits an appointment with the Cenegenics staff.



Barber consults with patient Hank Hofford.

Murphy had a heart valve replaced this summer, a surgery she said she may not have survived without the life-changing help of the physicians and the practices at Cenegenics Carolinas, a medical-based institute in Charleston that focuses on helping patients manage the aging process.

Most patients who seek the services of Cenegenics, run locally by Dr. Michale "Mickey" Barber, are simply looking to feel better, look better and live better. But in Murphy's case, it was more than that.

Murphy recalls a phone conversation she had with her sister-in-law in December 2006: "I thought that Christmas was going to be my last. I was 187 pounds and kept getting sick. I would get strep throat and the next week, have another infection. I couldn't get well."

Murphy also suffered from heart disease and aortic valve stenosis, a condition that impedes the flow of blood; but on top of that, she was stressed, not eating well or exercising and generally wasn't taking care of herself.

After a phone conversation about her symptoms with her sister-in-law, who had just started going to Cenegenics, Murphy hung up the phone and immediately made an appointment.

Hormone therapy

Cenegenics Carolinas, is one of five locations in the country, each independently owned, but all operated following the practices of the Nevada-based Cenegenics Medical Institute. The organization was founded in Las Vegas in 1997 and has since established a reputation for its scientific, proactive approach to age management, but not without controversy.

At the center of Cenegenics' approach to age management is hormone therapy, a tactic that uses "bioidentical hormone modulation to help patients regain and maintain metabolic and endocrine functions at the upper end of their normal range — for their age — creating the best opportunity for a healthier and more vigorous life."

Some, including Cenegenics advocates, claim that using by using doctor-prescribed hormones, an adult can: increase bone density and muscle mass, decrease body fat, improve the function of their heart, improve their mood and motivation, and increase exercise capability.

But other studies show side effects of the hormones, especially in unmonitored or high doses, may cause: arthritis-like symptoms, headaches, bloating, muscle pain, diabetes, abnormal growth of bones and internal organs and more, according to the Mayo Clinic.

However, the Cenegenics organization insists they've done their homework and only prescribe human growth hormone therapy if "a comprehensive evaluation reveals an adult growth hormone deficiency."

Battery of tests

The comprehensive evaluation performed on each Cenegenics patient begins with someone going to your home to draw a blood sample that will be put through more than 80 tests.

Barber, who owns the Charleston-based Cenegenics facility on King Street, explains that sending someone to your home to draw

"We're living so much longer, but we don't want to look or feel old."

— Dr. Michale "Mickey" Barber, owner of Cenegenics Carolinas

the blood is just the beginning of their private, patient-centered process that patients, like Murphy appreciate.

The results of the blood tests are available when the patient visits the Cenegenics office for the official evaluation. Part of that visit calls for patients to ride an exercise bike attached to a machine that measures their oxygen consumption and fitness level. Another machine, called a lunar densitometer, measures a patient's bone density as well as fat and lean muscle tissue. It's a full day of activities and consultations with doctors, nurses and nutrition and exercise experts.

"You leave with a comprehensive program," Barber said, which includes directives on how to eat properly, exercise and reduce stress. Patients are also prescribed a combination of vitamins and pharmaceuticals, and some are prescribed human growth hormones.

Everyone gets results

“Is everyone miraculous? No,” Barber said. “But everyone does get results.”

Most of Barber’s patients are business owners and executives with an annual income of at least \$100,000, mainly because Cenegenics does not accept health insurance.

At \$2,995 for the evaluation; about \$350 per month for medications and supplements; up to \$1,995 per month for human growth hormones (that are delivered to your home); as well as a monthly program fee, the experience is an investment in your health. And like most investments, it’s the long term results Barber and her patients are interested in.

Yes, most patients, like Hank Hofford of the local construction company, Bennett Hafford, see immediate results like weight loss, increased energy, reduced stress, a reduction in cholesterol, blood pressure and more. But what Barber said they are really targeting is the prevention of future diseases.

Hofford’s father died at 48 of a heart attack and though he jokes around about his own health, he knows it’s really no laughing matter. His wife, Susan Ford, originally made appointments at Cenegenics for herself and Hafford to get snapshot of their current health.

“She was pretty dolled up,” Hafford said of his wife after their evaluation 18 months ago. “She was already doing a lot of the stuff they recommended. I had some work to do.”

Hofford, 54, who has now lost about 15 pounds, said his healthy regimen includes a lot of fish, salads, soups, exercising three times a week with a trainer, a handful of vitamins and testosterone cream.

The results, in addition to his weight loss, include his cholesterol dropping from 280 to 140, an off-kilter thyroid that has evened out and a healthier lifestyle.

“I feel really good. I feel 30-ish,” he said.

“I think my job is to move people from where they are,” Barber said, adding that her patients come to her knowing they need to change, but they don’t know where to begin.

“Let’s face it, we are all getting older just sitting here,” Barber said. “We’re living so much longer, but we don’t want to look or feel old.”

Barber has treated men and women who generally range in age from 35-80. About one third



The lunar densitometer measures a patient’s bone density as well as fat and lean muscle tissue.

of her patients are doctors, or family members of a doctor. Most of her patients are men who complain of being tired, overweight and having a low sex drive.

Barber herself is a patient. Struck by a serious illness several years ago, the board-certified anesthesiologist and former professor at Tulane University, was forced to look at her own lifestyle and make changes.

“It’s a very emotional experience,” Barber, 53, said of the process Cenegenics puts its patients through. “It’s life changing.”

Case-in-point

Take Murphy, for example. When she completed her initial evaluation at Cenegenics in January 2007, she was a self-proclaimed mess, but she left the office armed with a plan.

“I just dove into this,” Murphy said. “This was my lifeline to try to get better.”

By May of 2008, she had lost nearly 40 pounds and her cholesterol and sugar levels had leveled off. Still, her hereditary heart condition required her to have valve replacement surgery, which she had in Cleveland on June

• A few Cenegenics basics:

- Drink half your body weight in water every day. For example, a 200-pound man should drink 100 ounces of water daily.
- Eat brightly colored fruits and vegetables.
- Don’t skip breakfast.
- Exercise daily.



27. She has since bounced back from the surgery at what her surgeons have called an unprecedented pace.

Two months later, Murphy was back at the Cenegenics office for her first post-surgery checkup with the Cenegenics staff.

“I feel like I’m starting my life for the very first time,” she said. “It’s been very much a rebirth.” **LL**