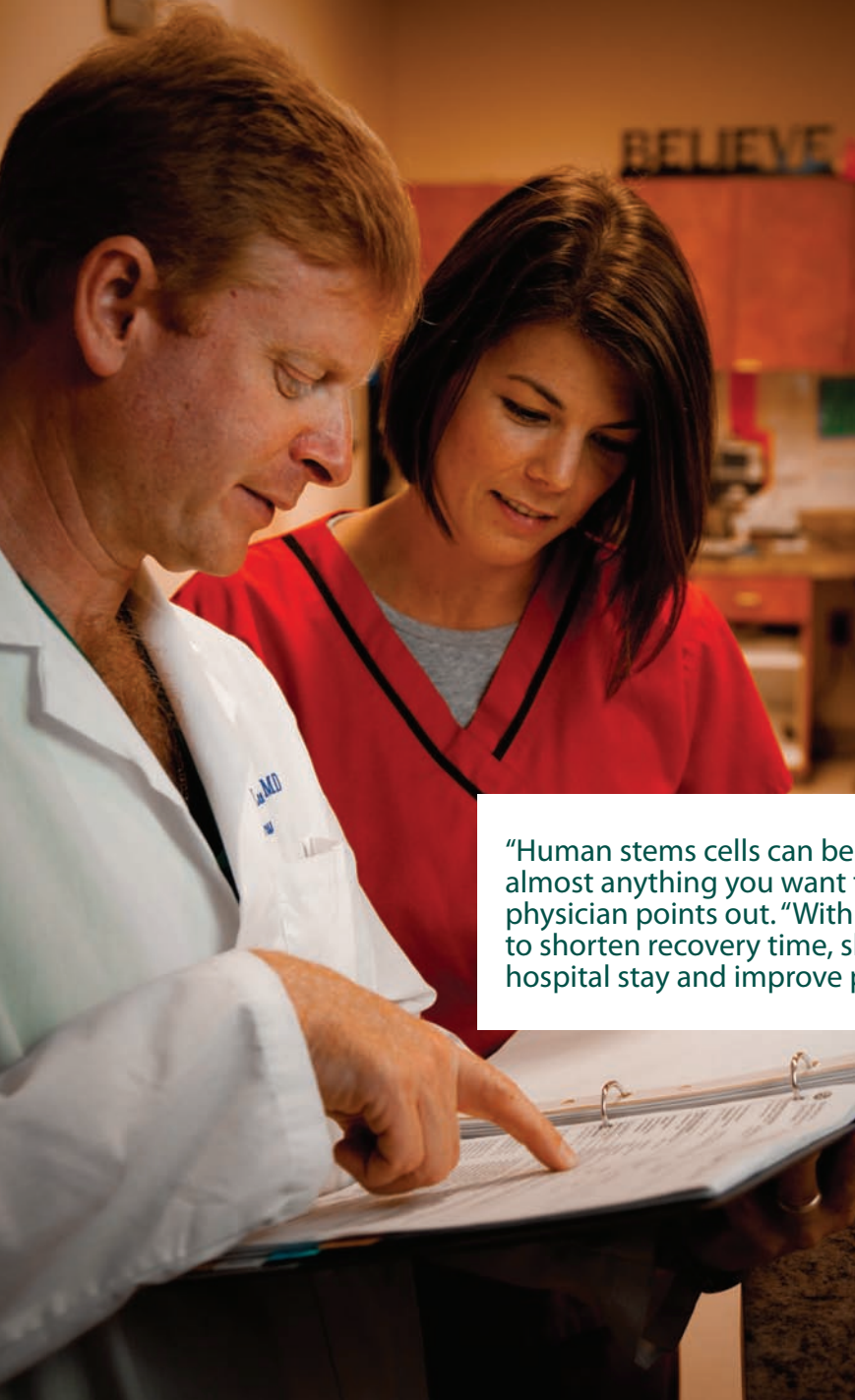




# GOT AN ACHING BACK?

need some answers?  
Spine surgeon Dr. Michael Leonard can help

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**“Human stems cells can be made to accomplish almost anything you want them to do,” the physician points out. “With Fusionary, we are able to shorten recovery time, shorten the length of the hospital stay and improve patient outcome.”**

involves using a patient’s own adult stem cells, which are harvested to enable fusion (a surgical procedure frequently employed by spine surgeons) without the need for a separate surgical procedure to harvest bone graft. It’s a major step forward for physicians and patients, as Leonard explains, since it enables the surgeon to achieve the desired results with less pain for the patient.

“Human stems cells can be made to accomplish almost anything you want them to do,” the physician points out. “With Fusionary, we are able to shorten recovery time, shorten the length of the hospital stay and improve patient outcome. We are just beginning to scratch the surface on the indications for adult stem cells, and I believe their usage will grow in importance and take on a variety of roles in medicine in the future. Someday they could make more traditional surgery obsolete.”

Leonard, who was born 44 years ago in Far Rockaway, N.Y., had a two-fold reason for going into medicine. One, he loves science. Two, he takes great satisfaction in helping people achieve wellness and a good quality of life. There were no doctors in the family to inspire him in this direction, he notes, but the desire to be of service to others was definitely in his genes.

His dad, a hardworking police officer, was in the Marine Corps, and his mom drove a school bus and later worked at a hospital. His brother, Robert, served in the U.S. Army and later followed their father onto the New York City Police Department. The neurosurgeon grew up around folks who had a sense of responsibility to community and country – and a very strong work ethic.

Leonard received his doctor of medicine degree from New York University, and then went on to complete his neurological surgery residency and a spine surgery fellowship at the NYU Medical Center and Bellevue Hospital. He was fortunate enough to get a health professions scholarship through the Air Force, and following his medical training, he served for three years as the director of spine surgery at Wilford Hall Medical Center and retains strong ties to the military.

“When I discovered neurosurgery – the fascinating intricacies of the brain and later the spine – I had no doubts as to my specialty” Leonard declares. “Neurosurgery is absolutely amazing in its complexity. There are endless mysteries to be solved, and that appeals to me.”

Neurosurgical mysteries involve a vast range of brain disorders, as well as conditions that can affect the spine and peripheral nerves. So convoluted and complicated is the field that Leonard believes no one should enter it unless there’s a true passion for the profession, plenty of dedication and a willingness to do some very hard work.

Spinal surgery, which occupies most of his time these days, is especially challenging with new innovations coming along all the time. Perhaps no medical field has changed so dramatically since its infancy in the 1930s when Henry Cushing, a general surgeon, set out to advance the science, thereby becoming one of the founding fathers of neurosurgery.

By the 1960s, concepts that would lead to the first CT scanner came along, and the first advances in fusion were made. Neuroimaging arrived about a decade later, as did other remarkable technological advances.

Today, the buzz is about minimally invasive surgical methods and the revolutionary therapies that the latest advances in biotechnology are providing, like the stem therapy Leonard employs on many of his patients.

Having trained at one of the leading neurosurgical residencies in the country,

Leonard brought along many of the field’s newest and most innovative ideas when he arrived in San Antonio at Wilford Hall Medical Center’s Department of Neurosurgery. By 2001, he was staff neurosurgeon and director of spine surgery there, and he continues to be associated with the facility on a consulting basis.

In addition, he serves as a clinical assistant professor of neurosurgery at the University of Texas Health Science Center Department of Neurosurgery, as well as on the clinical neurosurgery staff for the San Antonio VA.

In 2004, Leonard opened Alamo Neurosurgical Institute, his own comprehensive practice that now has two offices – one in North East San Antonio and one in New Braunfels.

The Alamo Neurosurgical Institute offers advanced help for all surgical disorders of the brain and spine, including all of the latest minimally invasive procedures. Being so multifaceted and experienced in such a variety of subjects, Leonard is often called upon for advice by medical colleagues. Dr. Ajeya P. Joshi of the San Antonio Orthopaedic Group especially appreciates Leonard’s assistance and willingness to collaborate.

Joshi and Leonard met quite by chance about four years ago on a challenging non-surgical case involving a hospitalized patient. Leonard’s insight and perspective were very helpful, Joshi points out, and since then, the two have provided second opinions for each other and have often worked together in the OR.

“Dr. Leonard’s demeanor, technical expertise and judgment are always top notch,” Joshi declares. “I’ve learned a lot working with him and value and respect him immensely.”

Patients feel the same way.

Cynthia C. Stobaugh, who consulted Leonard when back pain began cramping her running style, says the physician’s expertise is impressive. But in her opinion, his caring attitude is an even greater attribute.

Leonard cared and understood when Stobaugh told him she wanted to stay active; it was very important to her. At first, the 41-year-old athlete (she has three children and works as an assistant librarian) took injections for back pain, eventually switching from running to cycling because it was a bit easier on her back.

She kept on struggling with flair-ups, and one day, the flair-ups became constant. Pain got to be so severe that she could hardly walk. Operating to repair a herniated disc and related damage was the only option.

“It was scary to contemplate such a major surgery,” the patient admits. Leonard, however, helped her cope with her fears. “He’s a busy man but he was so kind – so was the entire clinic staff,” Stobaugh recalls. “They always took the time to talk to me and reassure me. When I went into the operating room, I was ready emotionally, and the whole experience was a very positive one.”

Today, Stobaugh has six titanium screws holding her back firm in the fused section. She has started cycling again and has high hopes that she will soon be back on the track.

“I want to race,” says the determined patient, who is now pain free and quickly regaining physical strength. “What Dr. Leonard has done for me is truly remarkable.”

Dealing with cases such as Stobaugh’s and realizing how much responsibility is in his surgical hands can be stressful for Leonard.

“I want to do my best ... I worry about each person who comes in the clinic door, and the people I operate on become friends, not just patients,” he reflects. “I think it’s a good way for a doctor to be, but it can take a toll. You have to get away sometimes and relax.”

His way of winding down is to work on his classic car collection, restoring old favorites such as a vintage 1969 Corvette to peak condition. He belongs to an online car forum where auto restoration fans “talk” with each other about their hobby.

He also loves to attend car shows whenever possible and has fond memories



of seeing big, old muscle cars when he was growing up in New York. “Great machines,” he says nostalgically, adding that the auto enthusiasts he has met are great people, too.

When he isn’t “doctoring up” old cars in the garage, Leonard likes to spend leisure moments with his family. He recently observed his 15th wedding anniversary with his wife, Meggan. They have three children: Mikey, 14, Matthew, 9, and Madelyn, 6.

Does he think the kids will go into medicine?

Matthew seems to be showing an interest in medicine and science lately, his proud Dad says.

“Mikey, our 14-year-old, is autistic, and Matthew is both a very compassionate brother and is also very interested in how something like this happens – how Mikey’s brain [is] different from others,” Leonard says. “Madelyn is a little too young to

know what might interest her, but she is smart as a whip, so there is no doubt she will be able to do whatever she wants.”

But it’s really too soon to know where life’s roads will take them. All of us have to find our own direction, the physician goes on to explain; all of us have to find our own callings. And no doubt about it, his calling is neurosurgery.

For more information about the Alamo Neurosurgical Institute, visit [www.ani-online.com](http://www.ani-online.com).

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