Breath—A Non-Invasive Approach to Chronic Low Back Pain

Chronic low back pain is one of the most challenging and expensive medical conditions in industrialized countries today. "It seems to resist considerable medical effort and expense and even seems to increase in spite of it," according to research by Wolf E. Mehling, MD, UCSF. In America, chronic low back pain costs approximately $26 billion per year. According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), 65 to 80 percent of all people have back pain at some time in their life. Chronic low back pain affects nearly 31 million Americans and is the most frequent cause of activity limitation or disability in people younger than 45 years old. The results are staggering in terms of lost human potential, lost income, lost productivity, and healthcare expenses.

The Institute for Breathexperience™ (U.S. Center for Middendorf Breathwork: San Francisco Bay Area) today announces the results from a recent and unprecedented research study at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) Osher Integrative Medicine Clinic, by Wolf E. Mehling, MD, which show the beneficial effects of Breath Therapy on patients with chronic low-back pain.

Measurable results showed that patients with moderate chronic low back pain of average 1-year duration, improved significantly in pain and function from Breath Therapy as much as from high-quality, extensive Physical Therapy. In addition, qualitative data from Breath Therapy suggest increased:

- Coping skill development
- Insights into the effects of stress on the body through breathexperience™
- Sense of well-being
- Responsibility for self-care of spine

Dr. Mehling, Primary Investigator of the research project, conducted a randomized controlled clinical trial of Breath Therapy for patients with chronic low back pain. The patients were males and females, ranging in age from 20-70, of mixed ethnic backgrounds. Patients with an average of 1-year of constant low back pain were randomly assigned to receive either Breath Therapy provided by practitioners from the Institute for Breathexperience™ (Middendorf Breathwork) in Berkeley, California, or Physical Therapy provided by UCSF physical therapists with many years of experience in treating chronic back pain. Physical Therapy was chosen as the control intervention as it is the standard of medical therapy for patients suffering from chronic back pain. Both therapies were provided in a standardized setting at UCSF Campus, Physical Therapy in the Physical Therapy Faculty Practice and Breath Therapy in the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine. The results were presented October, 2004, at the 2nd Bay Area Clinical Research Symposium, San Francisco, and made available to The Institute for Breathexperience™ for release on May 5, 2005.

Dr. Mehling is the first medical doctor in the U.S. to investigate breathexperience™ in an academic medical institution (UCSF).

The results of this study begin to fill a void in the medical field. Historically breath has been viewed as a function of the autonomic nervous system, focusing on the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the lungs and bloodstream. Breath is now recognized as affecting the balance of the autonomic nervous system. The powerful effect of the breath, as practiced in this approach to breath therapy has not been explored until this study. Breathexperience™ is a comprehensive system rather than a technique, which promotes in-depth patient participation and self-responsibility in healing. Since chronic low-back pain has reached almost epidemic proportions in our society today, this study offers a potential alternative to traditional medical methods. The study shows breath therapy's value as an adjunct to physical therapy and an alternative to painkillers and their side effects.

Breathexperience™ was developed by Professor llse Middendorf of Berlin, Germany over the past 70 years. Renowned in Europe for its beneficial healing effects, it is now gaining recognition in North America.

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Dr. Mehling, Assistant Clinical Professor and primary investigator of the UCSF study, and participating practitioners and teacher/trainers at the founding U.S. Institute for breathexperience™ are available for interviews.

For additional information, literature, videos, statistical graphs and tables:

Contact:
Juerg Roffler, Director, Institute for Breathexperience™
www.breathexperience.com
phone and fax: 510-981-1710