

**In medicine**

**Hi tech's new kid in town**

By BRUCE ETHERIDGE  
Physiotherapists are zapping patients with lasers, electricity and even sound waves to heal damaged muscles and injured joints.

As next week has been designated Physiotherapy Week in Markham, it may be a good time for residents to check out the latest technological hardware used in treating orthopedic injuries — from muscle strains to tendon tears.

Physiotherapy falls under the "medical umbrella" of rehabilitative medicine, explains local physiotherapist Donna Fitzpatrick.

The licensed profession requires its practitioners to complete four-year University degree programs.

Techniques used to ease pain and restore mobility to joints and muscles are varied. Physiotherapists use therapeutic exercises, manual therapy, heat, ice, water, weights and machines in their practice.

But the latest equipment is by far the most interesting.

"Ultrasound tends to break down scar tissue," says Markham physiotherapist Jennifer Zavitz as she rubs a device that looks like the end of a phone along the side of patient Paul Nutter's knee joint.

The 19-year-old strained ligaments in his knee after slipping on a patch of ice — while "chasing girls," his friends add.

Unlike the ultrasound used to display images of babies in the womb or of internal organs, these sound waves are absorbed into the tissue.

Ultrasound helps "decrease inflammation and speed up the healing process," says Miss Zavitz.

The latest innovation in physiotherapy is laser treatment. A helium-neon laser is used over acupuncture points to reduce the pain of arthritis, bursitis and tendonitis.

Jamie Perkin, 33, who developed tendonitis after his ski pole was jammed into his shoulder, said the laser treatment is painless. "You don't feel it at all," he says.

Donna Fitzpatrick has been a physiotherapist for over 10 years. One of the methods she uses, especially in the case of whiplash victims, is traction. Weights are used to gradually stretch stiff muscles and joints.

Ellen Richter-Winer, 31, was in a car accident four weeks ago. Along with traction therapy, she receives deep-heat and ultrasound treatment. Mrs. Richter-Winer says physiotherapy has "lessened the stiffness and pain."

Aside from dealing with a variety of problems, physiotherapists also treat a variety of ages. Mrs. Fitzpatrick says her clients have ranged from infants to the elderly.

See accompanying photos of today's therapeutic techniques on the facing page.

In recognition of Physiotherapy Week the Markham Physiotherapy Clinic is holding a free seminar on lower back pain on Thursday, March 17 at 8 p.m. To register call 416-471-4259.

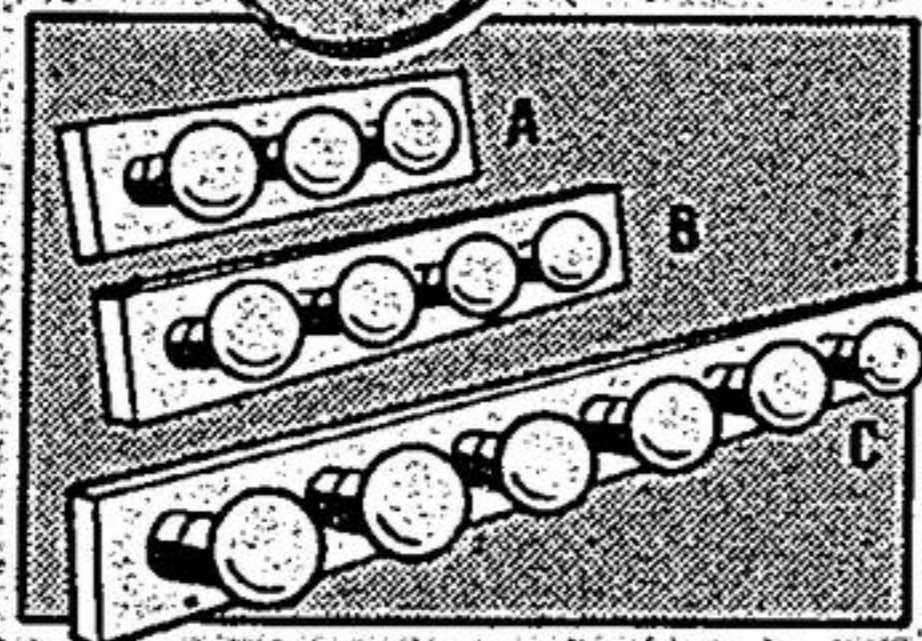
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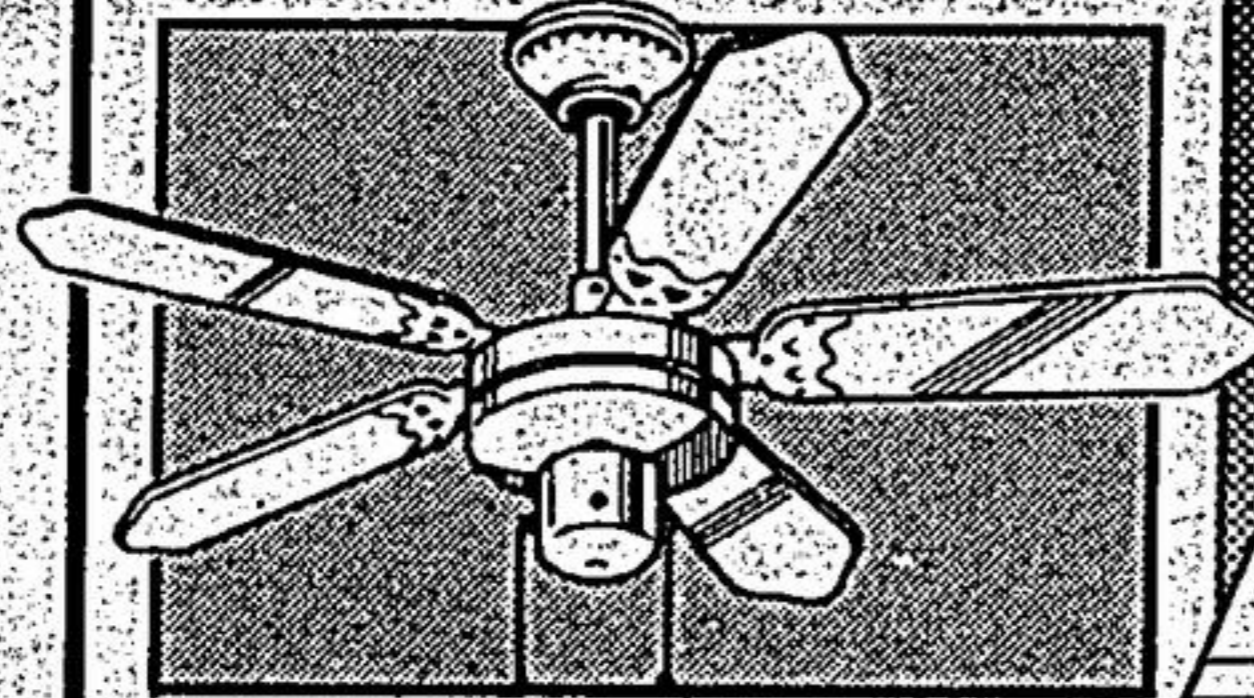
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