

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says the rate of opioid deaths is slowing for the first time since the epidemic began. Factors could include an emphasis on alternatives for managing pain such as physical therapy and exercise along with non-opioid medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).

Some physical therapists for OSF HealthCare are also using a technique known as dry needling for treatment of certain types of pain and movement impairments. Thirty five year-old Michael Downs of Knoxville is a prison guard and serves in the Army National Reserve. Downs suffered from [plantar fasciitis](#), an inflammation of the tissue in the foot that connects your heel to your toes.

He received cortisone shots but Downs was still in agonizing pain that lasted for 10 months.

OSF HealthCare Dry Needle Patient Michael Downs of Knoxville

“There were days it would get so bad that I would have to go hide (laughs) and cry a little bit, cry it out and then get back to work ‘cuz it was so painful.” (14)

Downs said the pain would force him awake at night and he would find himself using furniture to brace himself so he could walk.

Downs has a wife and three young children and worried about keeping his job and his Army Reserve status. So, a month and a half ago, he began receiving dry needle therapy at OSF HealthCare Saint Mary Medical Center in Galesburg. Physical Therapists such as Brea Cinnamon from OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center in Kewanee must undergo special training to use the technique on patients who have pain such as plantar fasciitis, tennis or golf elbow, or neck and lower back pain tied to muscular issues.

Cinnamon says dry needling is not acupuncture but it is an approach, supported by research, which involves inserting a thin needle to stimulate trigger points in the underlying membranes that wrap, connect and support muscles.

Physical Therapist Brea Cinnamon from OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center in Kewanee

“So it gives it some stimulation that kind of causes that muscle to contract around it a little bit to then where it relaxes and we’re able to work that tautness out of there.” (:12)

Cinnamon says the super-fine needle allows physical therapists to target tissues that otherwise can’t be manipulated.

Physical Therapist Brea Cinnamon from OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center in Kewanee

“The needle is very, very fine. When we get it out of the package, it’s encapsulated in a little case but it’s very flimsy. You can kind of see that it just moves up and down – it’s not a hard, metal needle.” *(:09)

Does the treatment hurt? Cinnamon says it does hurt a little.

Physical Therapist Brea Cinnamon from OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center in Kewanee

“But it’s not long lasting and it’s not severe, severe pain. Usually to people that are in a severe amount of pain, it feels like nothing to them.” (:10)

Michael Downs agrees. The short-term discomfort during treatment was far outweighed by the instant relief.

OSF HealthCare Dry Needle Patient Michael Downs of Knoxville

“I felt it immediately. But, it keeps on getting better after that point. I would come in every two days and I think after about five treatments I felt great. That’s when I started running again.” (:16)

Downs no longer experiences the stinging pain he would feel when he would put his feet down first thing in the morning. He says his left foot is 100 percent healed and he expects his right foot will be pain-free following a few more treatments.

If you think you could be helped, talk with [your doctor or physical therapist](#) to see if dry needle therapy is available at an OSF HealthCare location near you.