

All About Outcomes

At one successful practice, deep-tissue laser meshes with the core value of customer-driven care

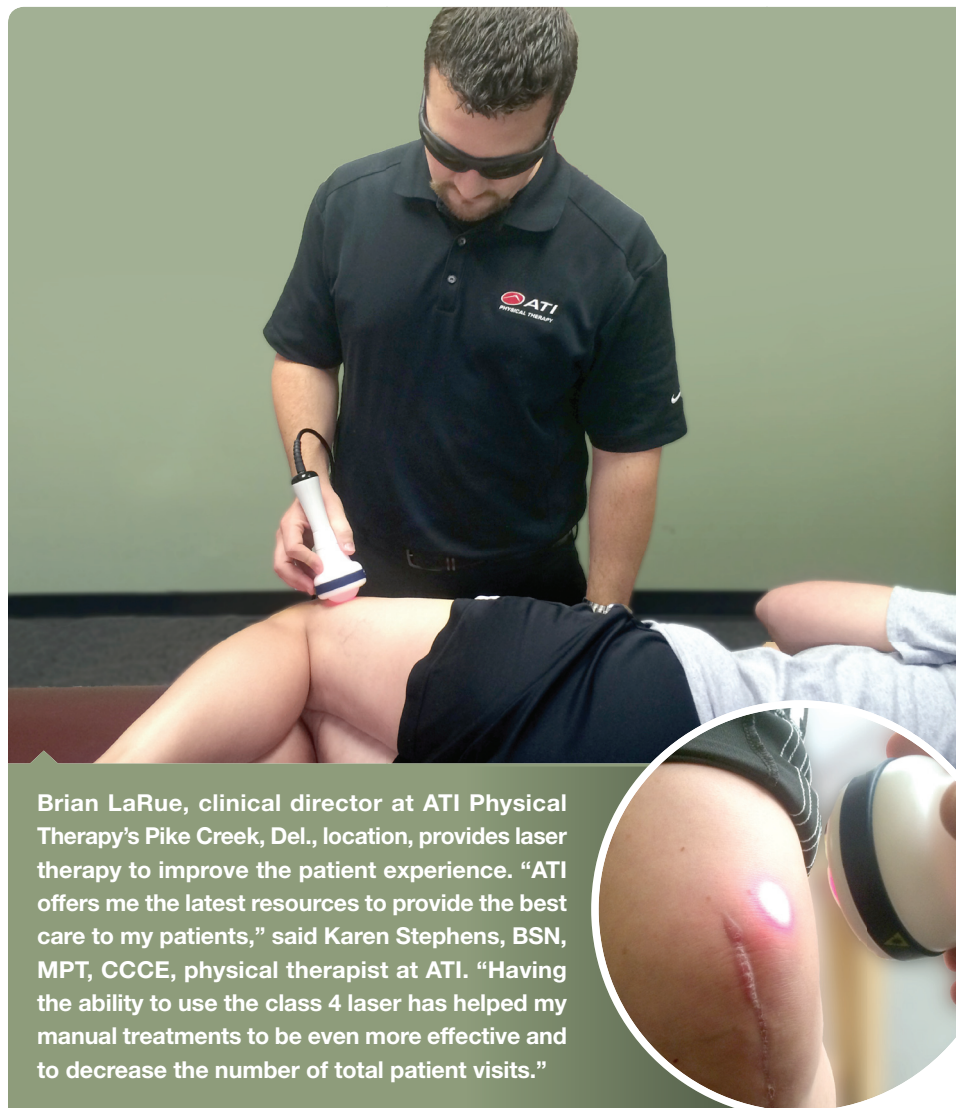
Brian LaRue, DPT, ATC, CWcHP

ATI Physical Therapy has a culture that's firmly integrated into every aspect of our clinic — from how we communicate within our internal team, to how we interact with patients and referring physicians. Our foundational core values are quality of care, a friendly factor, communication, and a team approach.

Everyone in the clinic buys into the ATI philosophy and upholds our mission to exceed customer expectations by providing the highest quality care in a friendly and encouraging environment. Our commitment to delivering a hands-on, patient-focused approach is elevating our standard of care as we strive to be the best.

When contemplating adding services to our practice, we look closely at our mission — will the addition help us provide a higher quality of care, and how will our patients, team and referring physicians respond?

The incorporation of deep-tissue laser therapy wasn't an easy decision — when integrating a new technology there's always the fear of the unknown. But fear didn't hold us back from bringing in this new modality, and the laser has stood up to the rigorous demands of our core values and mission. We can honestly say that after five



Brian LaRue, clinical director at ATI Physical Therapy's Pike Creek, Del., location, provides laser therapy to improve the patient experience. "ATI offers me the latest resources to provide the best care to my patients," said Karen Stephens, BSN, MPT, CCCE, physical therapist at ATI. "Having the ability to use the class 4 laser has helped my manual treatments to be even more effective and to decrease the number of total patient visits."

years of using our class 4 laser, it has made a tremendous impact, both clinically and in our business.

Making a Difference

In today's healthcare environment, we need to make an impact fast. We believe in beginning therapy on day one so we can immediately start making a positive impact.

On the day of the evaluation all patients are given a commitment letter that thanks them, outlines treatment, promises results, and describes their care. Both the patient and the therapist sign this letter to signify a mutual pledge to walking the path to recovery as a team — a formal commitment we are very proud of.

Our approach is multifaceted; if a patient isn't making progress, we try something different until we find a solution. This is where deep-tissue laser therapy has been a great asset to our clinic — when nothing else works, the laser can often provide results.

Acute injuries respond very well. For example, a lacrosse player came in who had a two-week-old contusion on his quad, preventing him from bending his knee past 90 degrees. We treated him with the laser, and three days later he was back to 100% function.

We're also seeing positive results on chronic and non-responding dysfunctions. Another patient was referred for nagging

low-back pain; I treated her SI joint for 7 minutes, and she immediately felt an improvement. These outcomes are what keep us reaching for the laser. If a patient comes in who hasn't had results at other clinics, why not try it?

Reducing pain and inflammation is the first step when it comes to progressing the patient and allowing us to get to primary treatment, especially in terms of gaining AROM and full strength. The ability of the deep-tissue laser to almost immediately reduce inflammation, in many cases, is helping us get to primary treatment faster.

Positive outcomes we see from the laser are far reaching — for our patients and our practice. We observed a noticeable spike in patient referrals after incorporating laser therapy. Patients with painful, non-responding conditions have been especially key in building word-of-mouth referrals because of the laser's ability to provide relief when nothing else worked. Patients who really struggled with pain went home and had very real, emotional stories about how their quality of life had improved, which inevitably resulted in new patient visits for us.

Physicians who refer to us have taken notice of what we've been able to accomplish with laser therapy. Our business development team plays a key role in educating referring doctors about the new technologies we offer. Several referring physicians refer patients to us just for laser; they swear by it because they've felt it. We often get scripts that read, "Laser?" They have felt the results and believe in it.

I believe that the reason for the increase in physician referrals is twofold. First, they are hearing positive feedback

from their patients; second, they are helping people avoid more aggressive surgical procedures.

Happy Patients, Happy Practice

Our patients are our customers, and we're always monitoring how we're doing and how we can improve. When we incorporated laser therapy, we noticed a measurable jump on our patient satisfaction surveys because of accelerated recovery times. This is especially important with insurance premiums and copays on the rise.

"Market through your patient" is a common phrase you'll hear within our walls. This simply means our team members are cognizant that these patients are our best ambassadors. We believe we are different and offer a superior level of care; our patients need to leave our clinic believing that too.

A key part of our dialogue is to explain the progressive treatment options we offer so patients understand the difference, and ultimately we make them feel special. We give them the individualized treatment and attention they need to have an outstanding experience. This makes them more likely to recommend others.

Our commitment to exceptional care is evident by the employment of therapists trained in advanced techniques and certifications including ART, dry needling, women's health, certified hand therapists, certified worker's comp healthcare professionals, and manual therapy designations such as MDT, COMT and FAAOMPT.

Above and Beyond

I've never been part of a clinic whose culture was so strong and present in every aspect.

Every day we have a "focus of the day" meeting, during which we discuss new patients, help the team with new ideas, and even have a "high five" day to bring positive energy to what we're doing that day. If a therapist sees a peer doing something that could be done better, we have an open culture in which it's OK to step in and give a hand.

Extending our culture beyond the walls of the clinic is part of our strategy for differentiation. We have a strong business development team whose role is to educate referring doctors and highlight the features and new technologies of each ATI clinic. Interestingly, when we educate about our use of deep-tissue laser therapy, we elicit the most enthusiastic responses. We get lots of great questions, and everyone wants to know more about it, because it can provide an alternative to more invasive procedures.

This sets us apart because the physicians know we're involved in what they're doing, and they know we're keeping a pulse on the latest therapeutic interventions. We are the rehabilitation experts — not because we are telling these physicians, but because we are showing them.

In an environment where results are paramount, copays are on the rise, and time is short, the laser has earned its spot in our clinic. This modality is helping us accomplish our clinical goals, impressing our referring physicians and getting people better, faster, which is what it's all about. ■

Brian LaRue is clinical director of the Pike Creek, Del., location of ATI Physical Therapy, a network of outpatient facilities with more than 300 offices in 10 states. Visit www.atipt.com