Male Menopause No Joke to Local Doc

Dr. Leonard Marks brings little-recognized ailment to light through research

By Andrew Grossberg

A visit to the Internet site for the Urological Sciences Research Foundation (usrf.org) reveals a lot about Dr. Leonard Marks, the organization’s founder:

It’s scholarly, with articles on the latest research into prostate cancer. It’s helpful, with information on new drugs.

And it’s even lighthearted, with a section called “Urology’s Lighter Side” (Viagra push-ups, boners on link).

It’s a combination of attributes the Culver City urologist uses to help patients deal with some uncomfortable topics.

Things like prostate cancer and impotency.

“Men don’t like going to the doctor, period,” Marks said. “A lot of studies show men mostly go to the doctor when their wives make them. It’s not a macho thing to go to the doctor.”

Marks, who also works at Brotman Medical Center as well as operating a private practice, started the foundation to help raise awareness about urological diseases. And to get the word out that new treatments are available for men who might be suffering from an illness.

“The thing that makes me really different from other physicians is the research foundation,” he said. “In the early 1990s, there was a sea change. There was the advent of drug therapy where only surgery had been available.”

He noted one invasive procedure that involved using a rooter-type device that removed obstructions.

“A pill took that operation away,” said the 56-year-old Marks. “Everything changed when new medications started coming out and there were medicines when previously there was only a surgical option.”

Another area Marks has spent time working on is male menopause. If it sounds like a joke on a late-night television show, it isn’t. In fact, it’s very common. Its more appropriate name is androgen decline in the aging male, or ADAM.

Symptoms include diminished sexual desire and erectile dysfunction; mood changes, fatigue and depression; decreased lean body mass, muscle volume and strength; decreased body hair and bone mineral density; and increased fat in vital organs.

The good news is that it can be treated in most cases.

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“Mark’s decision to eschew more upscale communities ultimately paid off.

In the ensuing years, Culver City undertook something of a renaissance and Marks made a home for his practice in the Culver Medical Plaza on Hughes Avenue.

“It was a good choice and my practice thrived,” he said. “I took one of the first offices and I never left.”

Through the years, Marks has become a fixture of the community. And he feels a special kinship with the residents he encounters in his office.

“This is a wonderful community,” he said.

The traditional doctor-patient relationship is more alive here than other places. First, it’s the community and the people themselves. This is Middle America. The people here are not Beverly Hills, they’re not fancy people. They still have respect and appreciation for their physician.”

In the early 1990s before he opened his nonprofit organization, Marks briefly thought about leaving the business. New therapies were changing the business and he wasn’t sure what the future would bring.

“Patients were quite scarce in private practice,” he said. “I thought of maybe going back to graduate school or moving to a smaller town, but my strength is I’m a good writer and I like research. And I really like the patients.”

He started the Urological Sciences Research Foundation in 1992.

“I took $10,000 and get an office and research nurse,” he said. “It’s a self-sustained entity. It has its own employees and it’s all separate from my practice.”

For fun, the Texas native and resident of Pacific Palisades enjoys bike riding, jazz music and skiing. He’s a married father of two grown children.

“I’ve made a nice home for myself in Culver City,” he said. “I just try to be straight with people and treat them fairly. I have thousands of active charts in my office. My success story is one man’s rediscovering himself and following his passion. I cannot wait to get to work in the morning.”