

Being in a painful business

Pain relief provider Lightheal Physiotherapy Clinic on expansion drive



by Behance Beh

A SORE back, wonky knee or heavy shoulders may cause a lot of pain and even bring the toughest of us to tears.

Though an endless array of drugs and surgery options are available to treat pain, technological developments allow us to address those pain issues without the need for invasive procedures.

One entrepreneur who turned pain into her business is Wholistic Ventures managing director Sandra De'Cruz, who operates Lightheal Physiotherapy Clinic.

It is one of the first to offer deep tissue laser therapy (DTLT), a drug-free and non-invasive modality which quickly relieves pain associated with neck, shoulder and back pain, arthritis, sports injuries and more.

Laser therapy is clinically proven to reduce pain and restore mobility as it accelerates the body's own natural healing process through photo-bio-stimulation.

"Our lasers feature photon energy which is absorbed by the body for regeneration. We are not just blocking pain but treating the root cause," says De'Cruz.

Lightheal's DTLT deploys the Lightforce therapy laser system by US-based medical devices manufacturer LiteCure.

"We had a patient who underwent a knee replacement surgery. Nine months after the procedure, she continued to suffer tremendous pain and was unable to bend her knees.

"After 10 treatments, her pain was relieved and she can now bend her knees at a 90-degree angle," she says.

In another case, an 84-year-old man suffered a fall and had trouble walking. Surgery was not an option due to his age. "He came to us with a walking frame, but



De'Cruz aims to have 15 Lightheal Physiotherapy Clinics abroad by end of next year

just after three to four weeks of treatment, he was able to walk freely."

Serving different markets

Wholistic Ventures is the regional distributor of Lightforce therapy lasers across Southeast Asia and the holding company for Light Heal Physiotherapy Clinic.

De'Cruz returned from the US in the late 1990s after completing a Masters in Biomedical Engineering.

"I was keen to conduct stem cell research when I returned from the US. But there were not many opportunities to do that in the country back then," she says.

Instead, she worked for a company that specialised in intelligent building management systems. This exposed her to the world of marketing and property development.

After some years, she felt a need to reconnect with her passion for healthcare. She then started an animal rehabilitation centre with a Dutch partner and offered laser therapy as part of the treatment.

"We started treating animals and found it helped with nerve regeneration, improved paralysis and helped with

[treating some] orthopaedic conditions. Pet owners soon asked why such treatment wasn't available to humans."

She soon gravitated towards the human healthcare market, and Wholistic Ventures was built upon it.

However, De'Cruz says there was initial scepticism. "Many clinics requested studies featuring a local Asean demographic as opposed to Western data and findings."

The first Lightheal Clinic opened in June in Bangsar South, Kuala Lumpur. Word-of-mouth advertising through patients who successfully underwent treatment increased, and it added to the growing awareness of such therapy.

The technology behind the therapy is the use of lasers for spot treatment. Infrared lamps were in vogue during the 1980s and 1990s, deploying a heating and light element to mask pain.

However, while infrared lamps managed to increase circulation at the area, it did not address the cause of the pain.

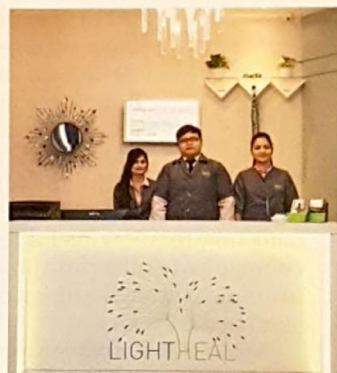
Building market awareness

Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines are major purchasers of Lightforce products sold through Wholistic Ventures.

De'Cruz says her company is gaining

The deep tissue laser therapy targets sore and problem areas

Lightheal's DTLT deploys the Lightforce therapy laser system by US-based medical devices manufacturer LiteCure



The Lightheal Physiotherapy Clinic at Bangsar South

a foothold as a result of having recently obtained all the necessary certification and documentation to show the treatment works.

"We are working with a few major hospitals and offering clinical trials on how the Lightforce therapy works.

"Many clinicians didn't know lasers can be used in this manner. We often tell them this is not a replacement for their discipline but complements existing treatments," she says.

While DTLT can replace certain elective surgeries, there are those that one should not decline. They include structural conditions such as severe compression of the spine where corrective surgery is needed.

DTLT differs from ablative aesthetic lasers which can sting the skin's surface. The lasers used in Lightforce therapy are considered "cold" since they operate using less than 15 watts of power.

The wattage can be adjusted to suit the treatment. For example, a treatment on the spine could take about 10 to 12 minutes of DTLT at 15 watts, while a skin burn can just take a few minutes at a lower wattage.

On Lightheal's expansion plans, De'Cruz says Wholistic Ventures will be opening two more clinics by the end of the year, one of which will be in Melaka.

"We are also looking to open some 15 clinics by the end of next year in Indonesia, Australia and Singapore," she says.

Wholistic Ventures' expansion plans are based on a capital investment model where interested parties can invest in new locations and markets which the company has identified.

It will also manage everything from concept to operation, while investors play a passive role in the venture.

She says many of the clinics will be funded on this model. "Many of our investors have a background in healthcare. Others have been dealing with pain for a long time. They see the value and future potential of pain management at a regional level."

De'Cruz says not all of her target audience are clinical patients. She is keen to tap into the sports and fitness market of athletes, gym goers, golfers and personal trainers who put their bodies through a high amount of wear and tear.

There is also a growing school of thought where people are veering away from accepted treatment to manage pain as long-term use of drugs may lead to adverse effects such as kidney and liver deterioration.

This group of people are more open to what is termed as "natural technology" which has little to no side effects.

"Our work with hospitals is mainly for clinicians to use our products to treat their in-patients while Lightheal deals with outpatients," says De'Cruz.

