

# Sports medicine — a health-care philosophy

The pain in **Richard Comtois'** leg was an enigma. Worsening over time, it changed depending on the type of exercise he did until eventually he could no longer walk up a hill without pain.

Even at 70, Comtois is extremely active. Competitive rowing has been his sport of choice for many years, and he has the medals to prove it.

"I went to the Family Medical Center at UWMC-Roosevelt for my leg pain, but my symptoms didn't fit into any diagnostic pattern," Comtois says. "Apparently, my unusual fitness level led to atypical symptoms."

Comtois' doctor referred him to **Dr. John O'Kane**, UW assistant professor of orthopaedics and sports medicine. Comtois had kept track of his symptoms, taking note of precisely how and when the pain



Dr. John O'Kane

would occur across a variety of activities. He brought this information with him to his visit with Dr. O'Kane.

"His description of symptoms helped me get on the right track," says Dr. O'Kane. "His history suggested thigh cramping with biking and calf cramping with running, both of which can be caused by insufficient blood supply.

Dr. O'Kane recognized Comtois' problem and diagnosed him with femoral artery stenosis—a blockage of the main artery in his right leg.

"You don't expect people with severe stenosis to be able to have the tolerance for exercise that Mr. Comtois did," says Dr. O'Kane.

"Sports medicine is attuned to the particular concerns of those who are determined to stay active," Comtois says. "In 1997, I had a shoulder replaced at UW Medical Center and in three days was back to light rowing on a machine

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Dr. John O'Kane



Richard Comtois keeps his shell at the UW Boat house and rows practically every morning.

for rehabilitation. Seven months later, I won the championship for my age group in the single racing shell at the Masters National Rowing Championships in Long Beach, Calif."

**Dr. Frederick Matsen**, Comtois' shoulder surgeon and the UW Chair of Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine says, "Richard used his positive, sports-minded attitude toward his shoulder surgery and every step of the way to his successful recovery."

Dr. O'Kane prescribed a sonogram to verify the location of the blockage in Comtois' leg before sending him to **Dr. R. Eugene Zierler**, UW professor of surgery.

Dr. Zierler used an angiogram to determine the severity of the blockage and performed surgery to repair the problem in September 2001. Today, Comtois is good as new.

"Sports medicine is a health-care philosophy," says Dr. O'Kane. "It is our job to help people return to a healthy, active lifestyle, or in the case of competitive athletes, to help them be as competitive as they can be."

For more information about sports medicine, call the UW Sports Medicine Clinic 206-543-1552

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