Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation FAQs

What is Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R)?
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R), also known as Physiatry, is a medical specialty practiced by medical doctors and doctors of osteopathy. PM&R doctors, or Physiatrists, are muscle, bone, joint, and nerve doctors who specialize in understanding how these different structures work together to cause people to have problems with pain and/or function. PM&R doctors are not surgeons, but rather specialize in treating people conservatively using a team approach with physical therapists and other practitioners.

How can a PM&R doctor help with a pelvic problem?
Besides the organs within the pelvis (such as the uterus, bladder, and rectum), there are many pelvic muscles, bones, joints, and nerves. They can be the cause of a variety of pelvic problems, such as pelvic pain, urinary incontinence, and chronic constipation. A PM&R doctor can help diagnose and treat many different pelvic problems that originate in the musculoskeletal or nervous systems.

What happens during a visit to a PM&R doctor?
The PM&R doctor will take a thorough medical history of your pelvic problems, and then will do a comprehensive physical examination of your nervous system and musculoskeletal system. Particular attention will be paid to the low back and hips, as problems in these areas can contribute to pelvic problems, particularly pelvic pain. There will also be a pelvic examination (both men and women), including vaginal and/or rectal examination, as appropriate. The PM&R pelvic exam will be different than what you may have had before if you’ve seen gynecologists or urologists, because a PM&R doctor is examining the nerve and muscle function of the pelvis. (Stirrups and a speculum are not used.) The PM&R doctor will discuss the findings of the physical exam with you, and will explain any further diagnostic testing needed and any treatment options recommended.

What types of treatments would a PM&R doctor recommend?
It depends on your symptoms, as well as what the physical exam reveals. In general, a PM&R doctor is likely to recommend a combination approach to treatment. One of the most effective treatments for pelvic disorders of the muscles, bones, and nerves is physical therapy (PT) performed by a pelvic physical therapist. In addition to PT, certain medications and support devices can be helpful. At times, injections of different medications into the spine, pelvic joints, or other pelvic structures can be beneficial. Treatment options will be individualized based on your particular situation.

What is pelvic physical therapy and how is it helpful?
If pelvic problems are caused by dysfunction of the muscles, bones, joints, or nerves in the pelvis, then physical therapy aimed at correcting the problems can be a highly effective treatment. A pelvic physical therapist can teach you how to better control these structures. At times, pelvic muscles need to be strengthened; in other cases they need to be lengthened or relaxed. Nerves can be mobilized and joints aligned. Physical therapists can help you regain balance, symmetry, and proper neuromuscular biomechanics within the pelvis, with the results being less pelvic pain and
improved urinary and bowel movement control. Pelvic physical therapists can also treat problems within the hips, legs, and low back that may be contributing to your pelvic symptoms.

Contact Us
To schedule an evaluation with a Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation specialist at UT Southwestern, call 214-645-8300.