

# Use of Class IV Laser Technology in Physical Therapy Practice

By Kristen N. Imperiale

**T**his article details how three clinic owners made the decision to integrate a new technology into their practice. They discuss the factors behind the decision, the process of integration, and the financial and clinical outcomes, as well as thoughts on the overall experience.

The following clinic owners were interviewed for this article:

**John Gallucci Jr., PT, DPT**  
 President, JAG Physical Therapy  
 West Orange, NJ  
 Also medical coordinator, Major League Soccer  
*Years in Practice:* JAG 6 years, MLS 15 years

**Richard Giordano, PT, DPT**  
 President, Sleepy Hollow PT  
 Hawthorne, NY  
*Years in practice:* PT 39 years, Owner 32 years

**Charles C. Donley, PT**  
 President, Regional Rehab Physical Therapy/Laser Center  
 Spring Hill, FL  
*Years in practice:* 11 years

**Q: You added a Class IV laser to your practice long before this device became popular. This was a large financial investment. What was the motivating factor behind you considering, and ultimately purchasing, this device?**

**RG:** Whenever adding a new modality or technique to our interventions, we as professionals have a responsibility to ensure that these new approaches are efficient, safe, and justified in achieving the highest quality of care for our patients. We examine the literature for the best evidence to support our decisions. We seek out seminars as well as other professionals who are presently utilizing these interventions. This process was undertaken when deciding to purchase a Class IV laser approximately 3 years ago. We made our decision and felt confident that we were upgrading the quality of our practice. As patients consistently report feeling significantly better after a laser treatment, our exhaustive investigation was worth every hour.

**JG:** As a physical therapist who treats many soft tissue pathologies, I was looking for a modality that could produce a quick clinical return on investment. To be able to keep your patients

active and reduce their pain simultaneously was a huge asset to my practice.

**CD:** I made the investment in the Class IV laser system because I saw the potential to offer treatment results that I never achieved as quickly before.

**Q: What conditions respond best to Class IV laser therapy?**

**JG:** All musculoskeletal inflammatory pathologies such as tendonitis and tendosynovitis.

**CD:** Pain and edema almost always respond during and/or after the first treatment.

**RG:** Patients training for marathons, baseball games, golf, or other sporting activities or those just wanting to be pain-free reported that the laser used in addition to our other interventions was directly responsible for getting them back into the game or back into pain-free activity.

**Q: How do you market your practice? Do you ever feature being a laser center?**

**JG:** We have a very expansive grassroots marketing plan that highlights all aspects of our practice. We do market that we have a Class IV laser to the tendonitis crowd.

**RG:** The laser has marketed itself because of the positive impact it produces. Our hand patients as well as the general orthopedic and sports population have benefited from this new modality.

**CD:** We advertise our practice in local newspapers, publications, and a variety of local monthly community papers. We speak to groups, including professionals, medical professionals, and at health fairs. We also use Talk Fusion video email to record success stories. We offer complimentary consultations and a free first treatment. We have experienced such success with laser therapy we changed our name to include "Laser Center."

**Q: How do you bill for Class IV laser therapy?**

**JG:** Fee for service.

**CD:** Fee for service—and business has doubled.

**RG:** We charge a nominal amount in line with the copay if it is just for laser treatment. We roll it into the visit otherwise.

**Q: Any "miracle" stories or patients who responded to Class IV Laser therapy when nothing else worked?**

**JG:** No miracles, we let God take care of those!

**CD:** Several miracle stories:

1. Amputation canceled thanks to laser treatment.

2. Ninth major abdominal adhesion surgery canceled due to pain relief from laser therapy (pain-free 14 months post laser treatments, 2-3 times per week for 4 weeks).
3. Two-year-old boy from Tanzania, Africa, was healed of deep partial thickness burns treated 2 days after injury. Pain was eliminated and edema reduced by 50% following the first treatment. Following the fifth treatment, the boy was healed. He had no scarring, and no range of motion or functional deficits at the completion of his course of treatment.

**Q: What challenges have you experienced with the integration of a Class IV laser into the practice?**

**JG:** Lack of insurance reimbursement.

**RG:** The integration of the laser into our practice has been seamless, except for the fact that more and more patients are being referred for laser treatments and we have to manage the growth.

**CD:** Scheduling the growth is our biggest challenge.

**Q: What advice would you give a clinic owner who might be considering adding a Class IV laser or any other high-end technology?**

**JG:** That he/she should look into any modality that can help off-set pain and swelling to be able to bring in functional activity.

**RG:** Do your research.

**CD:** Find a niche and be open to being on the cutting edge of fast, effective, lasting treatment results.

**Q: With several years and hundreds of patients under your belt, was it worth the up-front investment?**

**JG:** Yes, it is worth the investment.


**RG:** The variations in reimbursement in our health care industry today do not allow a clear calculation as to the direct cost/benefit in terms of direct fees for this service, but the additional referrals have more than compensated for the expense of our laser purchase.

**CD:** Absolutely worth the results. Our clinical and personal lives have changed dramatically from introducing the Class IV laser. We are providing the best in technology for pain and symptom relief to those who truly have no other options.

**Q: Any other thoughts on how new technologies are impacting the independent physical therapist?**

**RG:** There will always be new and highly touted innovations in our field of physical therapy; if they produce the positive impact the laser has in our clinic, the future looks very bright. ■

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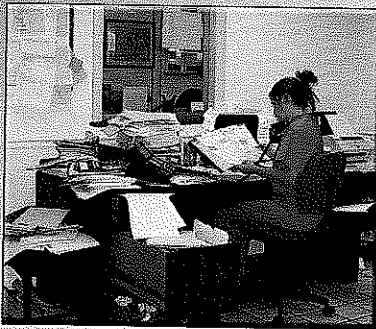
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