

Meet Dr. Jess

Manchester resident beats addiction to help others

Jessica Caruso, known as Dr. Jess to her patients, has practiced in New Hampshire for 10 years with her husband, Brian, who is the office's business manager. After a car accident left her with chronic pain, she became addicted to prescribed painkillers — until she learned the healing power of chiropractic care. She recently shifted her own chiropractic business away from insurance toward a low-cost, sliding scale.

Q: *What made you decide to become a chiropractor?*

In 1996, I got hit head-on by a drunk driver. It was the summer right before my last year of college. I just really suffered from the car accident. I was in and out of pain management therapy, physical therapy. I was constantly being prescribed painkillers and muscle relaxers and nothing was really working. Nothing was getting my quality of life to where it was prior to the accident. Not even two years later I met a chiropractor who was doing free spinal screenings at the gym I worked out at, and I went over to her to see what she had to offer. She was so kind and I felt like she really got what my needs were. After two weeks under her care, I saw such tremendous changes in my overall health. I was on these painkillers for close to a couple of years and it was toxic. My hair was falling out and I had digestive issues and acne and all these things were happening to me because of the medical treatments I was under. And after two weeks of being under [my chiropractor] I saw such a huge difference in my quality of life that she said, 'Maybe you should think about a career in chiropractics,' and I did.

I understand while you were on the painkillers you became addicted to them.

Yes. I share that with people because I don't want people to think there's shame in that. It can happen to anybody. Every time I was on one painkiller and I became immune to it, they'd give me a new one. It got to the point where it became an addiction, because I felt like I had no other answers. Being under chiropractic care, I was able to get myself off of those on my own. And I'm so thankful for that. It's a really scary thought: 'If I go down that road much longer, I'll have complete liver failure by the time I'm 40.' I was 21 at the time.

Five favorites

Favorite Book: *How To Talk So Your Kids Will Listen & Listen So Your Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish

Favorite Movie: *There's Something About Mary*

Favorite Musician: Rolling Stones

Favorite Food: Tofu tacos

Favorite thing about NH: Community. Best decision I ever made was moving here 10 years ago.



Jessica Caruso. Courtesy photo.

Your husband, Brian, handles the business end of the clinic. Do you have any advice for married couples who are also business partners?

To be honest with you, I think that, for us, being in business

together has actually strengthened our marriage because the way that we speak to each other in the office translates in to home too — with respect. ... It really works well for us. To be completely honest with you, before we got married, we went to couples therapy as a preventive measure. Just because we came from such different backgrounds that we thought, 'This might be a good idea to have somebody show us how to speak to each other and communicate effectively, especially where we're gonna be in business together.' We did that and we found it tremendously helpful.

On May 1, you changed your business model to a low-cost sliding scale at your Manchester clinic. What's been the reaction so far?

We did the test market, if you will, in Portsmouth. In December 2012, we opened a sliding scale chiropractic office in Market Square. It's been so well received. People have been so grateful for it. It really gives us the warm and fuzzies that we go to work every day knowing that we're making a difference and giving people the care or the options for care that they maybe couldn't afford before. ... Since May 1, when we moved over to this new model [in the Manchester clinic], consistently people are calling up for patient visits or booking online or coming in and saying 'I never thought I'd be able to afford care before but I saw you on Facebook or I have a neighbor who sees you or a coworker and this is such a great thing that you're doing. Thank you so much for doing it for us.' It feels really good. It feels like it's the right thing for us. ... [My husband and I] have an insurance policy with a really high deductible and we have student loans and a mortgage and a child. We thought to ourselves, 'Could we afford to go in and pay out-of-pocket through insurance rates for care that we're recommending for other people?' And the answer was 'no.'

— Ryan Lessard 🗨️