

Background on Dr. Hans Kraus*

Dr. Kraus developed a now widely used approach for treating lower back pain, which he used to ease President John F. Kennedy's back problems and those of other well-known patients. He became one of the President's doctors after serving on the President's Council on Physical Fitness during the Eisenhower Administration.

He was also a mountaineer and rock climber who pursued those sports into his 70s.

Dr. Kraus helped establish the Presidential Council after he completed a 1954 study showing that American schoolchildren were less physically fit than a group of Italian and Austrian children. The study measured muscle strength and flexibility.

Dr. Kraus, who was associate professor of clinical physical medicine and rehabilitation at the New York University School of Medicine until he retired in 1973, developed trigger-point therapy for the relief of back pain. In this approach, a local anesthetic is injected into tender areas, or trigger points. He showed that lower back pain was related to lack of muscle tone, strength and flexibility.

"Dr. Kraus's approach was controversial within the American medical establishment," Susan Schwartz, who is writing his biography, said. "He relied strongly on strengthening and stretching exercises, common sense, and avoiding surgery at all costs. His treatments were seemingly old-fashioned, time-consuming, and relatively unprofitable for a doctor."

While many in the medical profession fought Dr. Kraus's approach, it won him a huge clientele. Patients in his private practice included Katharine Hepburn, Eleanor Roosevelt, Arthur Godfrey, Yul Brynner, Rita Hayworth, Angela Lansbury, Oleg Cassini, Paulette Goddard, Robert F. Kennedy and the skier Billy Kidd, who said that Dr. Kraus's treatments made it possible for him to win an Olympic gold medal.

"He was the father of sports medicine in this country," said Dr. Bruce Grynbaum, clinical director of the Rusk Institute at New York University. "He was the first to actively mobilize fractures. He discovered trigger-point injections in back problems, including President Kennedy's."

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