Spine Surgeon Uses ILIF Procedure To Treat Lumbar Spinal Stenosis

SANTA MONICA, Calif.-- (BUSINESS WIRE) — Jun. 23, 2009-- Only 37, Janie Lee had endured excruciating back pain for 20 years. She couldn't stay in one position for more than five minutes, and walking hunched over was the only way she could get around. Her search for help took her to several doctors and an emergency room, but it wasn't until she found Hyun Bae, M.D., a renowned spine specialist at Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica that she received the diagnosis and care that would return her life to her.

After taking an MRI, orthopedic surgeon Dr. Bae diagnosed Lee with spinal stenosis, a narrowing of the spinal canal. Spinal stenosis, which affects about 500,000 people, is usually found in older people due to the wear and tear of aging. But about 15 percent of patients are born with a narrow spinal canal. "This was the case with Janie. The narrowing of her spinal canal was pinching her nerves. Her pain was even more severe because she also had a collapsed vertebral disc at the same location as the narrowed canal," said Dr. Bae.

"Even though I was in extreme pain, I felt very comfortable with Dr. Bae," said Lee. "I trusted that he understood my condition and knew what he was doing."

Dr. Bae performed a minimally disruptive procedure called ILIF™ (Interlaminar Lumbar Instrumented Fusion), which involves temporarily opening up the space between the spinous processes and careful removal of small sections of bone to relieve the pressure on the spinal cord and nerves. He then placed a precision-machined allograft bone between the spinous processes to open up the areas that were pressing on the spinal cord and fuse the bones. Finally, Dr. Bae attached a small plate to both spinous processes to stabilize the segment of the spine, eliminating the need for more extensive surgery.

Dr. Bae helped develop ILIF in collaboration with San Diego-based NuVasive, Inc. The ILIF procedure was developed to overcome the potential shortcomings of standard lumbar spinal stenosis treatments (e.g., decompression alone and decompression with fusion), using a minimally disruptive surgical technique. "It's like a car jack for the back," he explained. "The minimally invasive procedure requires an incision of only about two inches, and results in minimal blood loss."

Patients typically require a one- to two-day hospital stay. Lee needed just three weeks of rehabilitation instead of the three to four months that spinal fusion, the conventional treatment for the condition, requires. "The nursing staff at Saint John's was so supportive," Lee said. And she has high praise for Arbor View Rehabilitation and Wellness Center.

The mother of three is now pain free, able to do everyday tasks that were previously impossible and is enjoying life. "My back is straightened up, and my life is getting straightened up," she said with a laugh.

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