

Nothing to Fear

Safe, Effective Spine Surgery Helps Relieve Low Back Pain

Faced with the prospect of spine surgery, Sandra admits she was scared. The 54-year-old Annandale homemaker had been experiencing increasingly severe back pain for several years. When an MRI revealed she had two bulging discs in her lower back, she knew she had to take action. Sandra was already a Commonwealth Orthopaedics patient for her knees, so she looked at a list of physicians on the Web site and selected spine specialist Steven Hughes, MD to treat her back pain.

At her first appointment, Dr. Hughes laid out the options: Sandra could have surgery or she could try non-surgical treatments to manage the pain. "At that point, my attitude was 'anything but surgery,'" she recalls. "I was quite fearful and tried to convince myself my back pain wasn't all that bad. Dr. Hughes was very understanding and didn't pressure me at all. He let me make the decision and I chose the non-surgical route."

Sandra tried medication, physical therapy and steroid injections, to no avail. When the pain became so excruciating she had trouble standing, bending and doing housework, Dr. Hughes sent her for targeted epidural steroid injections using X-ray guidance. The X-rays revealed she had several spinal cysts and one of them had ruptured.

That discovery, along with the knowledge that her worsening knee problems would eventually require replacement surgery, forced Sandra to overcome her fears and have back surgery. Dr. Hughes performed a minimally invasive fusion of her lumbar spine. As he explains, her course of treatment is typical for patients with low back pain. "We often try non-operative measures first, such as physical therapy, non-steroidal drugs, injections, chiropractic

treatment, acupuncture, yoga and Pilates. If these fail to provide suitable relief, or there is any significant weakness or numbness, we recommend surgery. While there is a lot of fear in the lay population, surgery is very safe, very effective, and most people achieve their desired level of no or minimal pain."

One of the biggest advancements in spine fusion surgery is the use of bone graft substitute. "We used to take bone from the patient's hip as part of the procedure," says Tushar Patel, a Commonwealth Orthopaedics spine specialist. "Now we use genetically engineered proteins, which stimulate bone growth naturally in the body, or a ceramic synthetic product such as INFUSE®. As a result, there's much less pain and blood loss, and recovery is significantly faster because we no longer harvest bone directly from the patient."

Other advancements that Commonwealth offers include the minimally invasive TLIF and XLIF procedures. During TLIF (transforaminal lumbar interbody fusion), surgeons approach the spine from the side of the spinal canal through a midline incision in the patient's back, sparing nerves and muscles. XLIF (extreme lateral interbody fusion) is performed through the patient's side, avoiding the major muscles of the back.

Dr. Patel cautions that minimally invasive spine fusion surgery is not for everyone. "The circumstances surrounding each case are different, so we must evaluate patients carefully, as individuals, to determine the best course of action. In many cases, surgery is not indicated. In others, traditional open spinal fusion produces results that are as good as, or better, than the less invasive alternative. Obtaining a successful result depends on a host of factors, and patients should discuss these thoroughly with a qualified spine surgeon before

Video Extra!

Dr. Hughes explains How to Diagnose & Treat Back Pain in a special video feature at www.c-o-r.com/videos



making any decisions.”

Sandra is now pain free and had such a positive experience she has since sent her son, husband, and mother to Dr. Hughes for surgery. “My family and I cannot speak highly enough about the wonderful care we’ve received from Dr. Hughes and Commonwealth Orthopaedics,” she says. “My only regret is that I didn’t have surgery sooner. I would have spared myself so much pain and effort, and maybe done less damage. If I could say just one thing to others in my situation, it is this: **don’t let your fear stop you from getting the help you need.**”

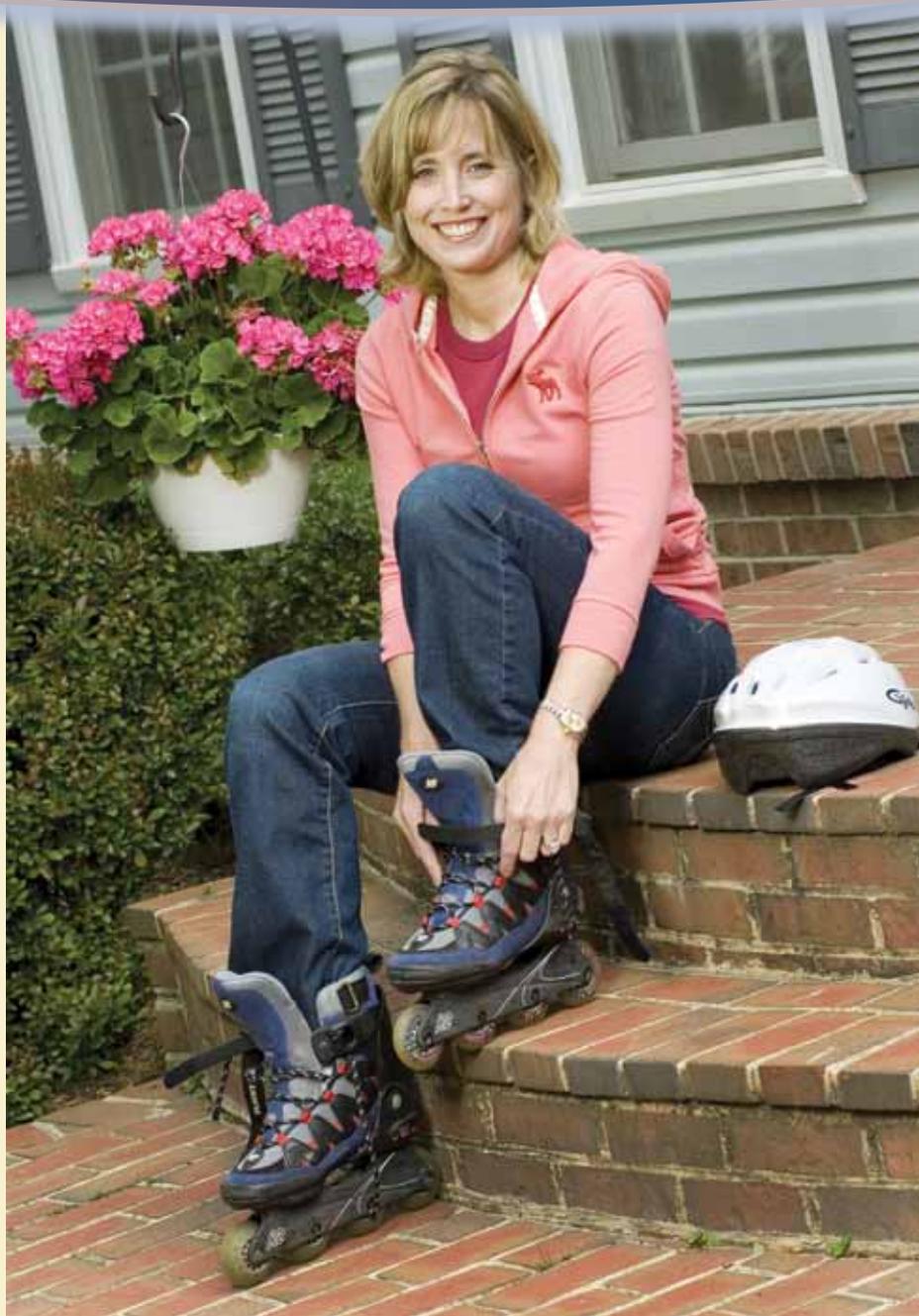


Steven S. Hughes, MD, graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Rochester and completed his medical degree with honors from the University of Rochester School of Medicine. Dr. Hughes worked as a surgical intern at Bethesda Naval Hospital and was later honorably discharged after serving as a Commander in the United States Navy. Following his internship, he completed an orthopaedic surgery residency at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester and a fellowship in spinal surgery at Case Western Reserve Hospital.



Tushar Ch. Patel, MD, earned his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and completed his orthopaedic surgery residency at George Washington University Medical Center. He then went on to do a fellowship in Spinal Surgery at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Cleveland, Ohio.

For full biographies and a complete directory of the physicians at Commonwealth Orthopaedics who perform these and other procedures visit our website at www.c-o-r.com.



“The XLIF procedure really changed my life. I feel like I can get back to my life, and I am so glad to be able to do that.”

Lisa – Centreville
XLIF Spine Surgery