A Real Pain in the Neck

The discomfort of dealing with spinal issues

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Disk Replacement and Telespine Available Through WCH with Dr. Safdar Khan

By Karen Shulk

Back pain can be a pain in the neck - and legs and arms can affect one’s ability to lead a normal life. Sufferers usually try numerous methods of pain relief like massotherapy, physical therapy, spinal adjustments and epidurals, but sometimes surgery is the only next step that can provide much-needed relief.

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Dr. Khan, serves as The Benjamin R. and Helen Slack Wilberger Endowed Chair in Orthopaedic Spine Surgery at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

Khan says, “The Department of Orthopedics had had a long fruitful relationship (with Wooster Community Hospital) already, but a needs assessment showed a big void of appropriate spine care in the community so bringing OSU staff close to home was high on my list.” Dr. Khan is seeing patients at the WCH HealthPoint Facility within the Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine practice with Doctors Chicorelli and Todd.

As the local program grows, he hopes to recruit additional spine surgeons and plans to increase his own travel frequency to Wooster to make spinal surgery efficient and convenient for Wooster-area patients.

Most procedures done at WCH will be outpatient in nature or with a short inpatient stay. If the procedure is more complex the patient may undergo surgery in Columbus. Thanks to research some spinal surgeries have been modified to produce less complications and even better long-term results. This includes cervical disk replacement.

The cervical vertebrae and discs are sophisticated mechanical structures that are able to absorb significant patient comes in with neck or arm pain it is because of disk herniation. Traditional treatment has been fusion with plates and screws, but then the cervical spine loses motion, so disks above and below the fusion start wearing out – about 25 percent over 10 years. So that prompted us to look at taking the soft tissue out and using a prosthetic that moves the neck to decrease attempted pressure yet provide an impressive range of motion in the neck, so when a disc is no longer functioning properly, repair or artificial replacement can be a challenge.

Khan explained, “Typically when a method used, Khan strives to make the process as comfortable as possible. Knowing surgery is a tense time for his patients, he works to treat each patient as he would treat a member of his own family. Ruth Hawkins of West Salem is an example. The 82-year-old had been receiving pain care management from a local doctor who was out of options to ease Hawkins’ pain and numbness in her lower extremities.

With a diagnosis of spinal stenosis, Hawkins said, “It was difficult to walk or do activities that I like to do.” It was recommended that Hawkins meet with Khan.

Hawkins’ successful surgery was performed in Columbus in August, but she is able to attend her post-operative exams close to home. “I’ve never hugged a doctor before, but when I went to see him in Wooster for my follow-up, I asked him if I could give him a hug.”

To further enhance efforts to increase efficiency and convenience and to make sure his patients in Wooster get the same level of care as at a major academic center, Khan is working to roll out Telespine, an online system of care that he said “will bring OSU to their doorstep.”

“This is something I’m very excited about,” Khan said. Telemedicine can be used at remote locations using an app on a phone or a video station in a clinic to a distant doctor. The surgeon said, “We’re looking to roll this out shortly, so no longer should they have to travel or wait.”