

No More 'Dog-Biting' Back Pain



The 50-year old Canadian braved a 36-hour trip from his remote town 200 miles from Montreal to Singapore's Mount Elizabeth Hospital for treatment.

For almost 30 years, Patrick Perreault has been told that his chronic back pain is something that he will have to live with for the rest of his life. Tired of his doctors' usual 'prescription' of painkillers and bed rest, Patrick sought alternative advice that pointed him to Parkway Health in Singapore. The 50-year old Canadian braved a 36-hour trip from his remote town 200 miles from Montreal to Singapore's Mount Elizabeth Hospital for treatment.

Due to the hazardous nature of his job as an electric power lineman, Patrick spent most of his time 'hanging high up' in the outdoors doing installation and maintenance works. However, a fateful day in 1980, while working, Patrick fell from 42 feet and injured his back. After that fall, frequent trips to the Accident & Emergency Department became a norm for him. Each time, the doctors would just prescribe a cocktail of painkillers and tell him that his pain would go away in no time. Indeed the pain receded briefly, but it would always come back to haunt.

Being a proud and sturdy man, Patrick was not one to complain so he tolerated the pain and took it in his stride over the years. However, by 2000, his back pain was affecting him so much that it affected his work and eventually had to be redeployed as a security guard. Even his wife's regular fasciathérapie (mémoire fascia) massage and reflexology that used to provide him with some relief began to lose their effect.

Very disillusioned, Patrick decided to seek alternative medical treatment outside of Canada. His search led him to Aruna Th-Hollingshead, a Sri Lankan-born Canadian, who runs the Overseas Medical Services Canada Inc. (OMS), a company that helps those seeking medical treatment overseas to find a physician and hospital suited to their specific medical needs. Besides making arrangements for travel, treatment and accommodation, OMS also provides after-care services once the patient returns home.

Patrick recounts, "We spoke with Aruna on my medical needs and she immediately explained things to us and quickly made arrangements for me. She earmarked hospitals in Costa Rica, India and Singapore as possible options for treatment for my selection. At that point in time, I didn't know anything about Singapore's medical capabilities. Eventually we decided on Singapore, based on the country's long list of advantages over other destinations."

On arrival in Singapore on 13 August 2008, Patrick was received by the ParkwayHealth's staff at the Changi International Airport and chauffeured to Mount Elizabeth Hospital where he was admitted straight into his own private room. On the very same day, he met Dr Tan Chong Tien, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon in person for the first time.

Patrick's MRI scans had been sent to Singapore earlier for review by Dr Tan. After studying the many scan results, Dr Tan concluded that Patrick had a prolapsed (out of place) herniated disc. The weak spot in the outer core of the disc is directly under the spinal nerve root, so a hernia in this area puts direct pressure on the nerve, which in turn causes sciatica – pain that radiates all the way down from Patrick's leg to the foot. This was the cause of his chronic back pain.

A thorough examination further revealed he had some limitations of lumbar spine flexion and the MRI of his lumbar spine revealed a broad base L3-4 disc bulge, L4-5 root canal stenosis and L5-S1 centre-left disc prolapse impinging left S1 nerve root.



All geared up and ready for his surgery

Dr Tan shared, "Patrick has been experiencing low back pain radiating down to his posterior left thigh and occasionally to his left calf since September 2007. His symptom was aggravated by lifting objects and prolonged walking. From time to time his pain could be very severe and unbearable."

So Dr Tan decided on performing a L5-S1 Microdisectomy for Patrick. Using microsurgical techniques and a small incision, the microdisectomy helped to take the pressure off the nerve root by removing the portion of the disc that is pressing on it, and to provide the nerve with a better healing environment. The surgery progressed without complications and by the third day, Patrick was well enough to be discharged.

He immediately noticed a distinctive difference. **“Amazingly, the ‘dog-biting’ back and leg pain I had grown accustomed to over the years has gradually gone. I can now walk for long distance and stand up without any numbness in my left leg. It has been quite a while since I felt so liberated!”**

In fact, just a day after his discharge, Patrick was fit and ready to hit the Singapore streets! Like any typical tourists, he visited some of Singapore’s famous tourist attractions like the Chinatown, Jurong Bird Park, Sentosa and went onboard the Singapore Flyer, and even tried Singapore’s signature dish - chilli crabs!

In his post-surgery review, Dr Tan was positive of Patrick’s progress. **“Patrick is doing very well after his surgery. He had good relief of his back and left thigh pain and no longer required any pain relief medication. I have also advised him on the principles of back care.”**

Patrick understands that he is still prone to back pain in future in view of multiple levels of disc degeneration and that there is 10% risk of recurrent disc prolapse at L5-S1 segment. However, he is also aware that if he had not undergone this treatment for his most severe disc degeneration site (L5), he would no doubt live out the remainder of his life with severe back pain leading to a downgrade in quality of life.

“The whole experience in Singapore since I touched down has been very pleasant and good. The hospitality that I received upon arrival, the professionalism of Dr Tan and his team of doctors and nurses at Mount Elizabeth Hospital, as well as the caring and friendly staff at ParkwayHealth, had indeed alleviated my fear

and pain, and brought hope to my life. I’ve never seen such level of care and service back home. I am really grateful to all of them for going the extra mile to nurse me back to health. I will strongly recommend Singapore’s ParkwayHealth to my family and friends who are thinking of seeking medical care outside Canada,” Patrick insisted.

Patrick returned home on 22 August 2008, five days sooner than expected due to his speedy recovery, to celebrate his new lease of life with his family in Quebec. He has also gone back to his active lifestyle of cycling, hunting and fishing - the hobbies that he gave up for many years due to his back problem. The happy father of two grown-up children shared that he will definitely return to Singapore again in future, with his family to tour our beautiful garden city.



A photo of Patrick taken two weeks after his surgery - indulging in his favourite hobby, fishing.