Science of Health: Spine Surgery Patient Crosses the Continent to Ditch Wheelchair, Receive Proper Diagnosis

**Canadian retired hospital administrator travels to Cleveland for spine surgery, expert coordination of care at UH.**

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Page Image



Page Content

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Telemedicine brought the Canadian healthcare strategist to the neurological specialists in Cleveland – and their expertise led him to the UH Spine Institute and a diagnosis and treatment for a rather sudden loss of mobility.

A retired hospital administrator now active as a hypnotherapist and writer, Tim Hall, Ph.D., splits his time between California and Sioux Falls, S.D. For most of his 81 years, Dr. Hall believed that the difficulty with movement and muscle coordination that had plagued him since childhood was cerebral palsy.

His fiancé, a pediatric hospitalist, opened his eyes to a new diagnosis when she consulted with a neurologist she knew in Cleveland. Dariush Saghafi, MD, a UH-trained neurologist who now works at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, observed symptoms more consistent with a genetic condition known as dopa-responsive dystonia, a disorder that triggers involuntary muscle contractions, tremors and uncontrolled movements – and often mistaken as cerebral palsy.

“This particular disorder is more common than people think," Dr. Saghafi said.

Dr. Hall's situation worsened about three months ago when he lost feeling in his left leg. Confined to a wheelchair and running out of treatment options in South Dakota, the couple decided to come to Cleveland.

“We hit a dead end in Sioux Falls, so we arranged to come here in person," said Lois Freisleben-Cook, MD, his fiancé, who worried that without surgical intervention, her partner could lose continence, sexual function and never regain the ability to walk.

“It was worth the trip just to see Dr. Saghafi and to have him orchestrate the unbelievable level of care we've had here at University Hospitals."

Bashar Katirji, MD, Director of the Neuromuscular Center and EMG Laboratory at UH Cleveland Medical Center and the physician who trained Dr. Saghafi in the 1990s, performed the EMG and neurological consult that confirmed acute changes due to lumbar canal stenosis. Considering Dr. Hall's active lifestyle and otherwise good health, surgery was recommended.

“He had great coordination of care," said Richard Rhiew, MD, PhD, the neurosurgeon who visited Dr. Hall at UH Parma Medical Center and performed his minimally invasive spine surgery. “By the next morning after surgery, he was ready for inpatient rehab, with three hours of intensive daily therapy."

After two weeks in UH Parma Medical Center's Acute Rehabilitation Unit, Dr. Hall is ready to fly home for more therapy at a skilled nursing facility near family. He has been thrilled for skilled and compassionate physicians who expedited the process to ensure timely and effective care.

“I'm doing well now," Dr. Hall declared. “The care here is wonderful, and it was absolutely glorious how they made arrangements to expedite my care. I know when you have surgery from the best you are ahead of everybody in the world."

The nationally recognized experts at the [UH Spine Institute](http://www.uhhospitals.org/services/spine/spine-institute) provide a full range of treatments for conditions from common back pain to the most complex spine problems. View [locations across Northeast Ohio](http://www.uhhospitals.org/services/spine/spine-institute/locations) and call the Spine Line at 216-286-8888 for a referral.

Photo above: Dr. Hall must undergo at least three hours of intensive therapy each day, pictured here with neurosurgeon Richard Rhiew, MD, PhD (left) and Alex Hochevar, RN (right).

Photo on News page (left to right): Emi Paul, OTR/L, Nicole Seigler, OTR/L, Margaret Hale, COTA/L, Lisa Hampton, PT, Megan O'Neill, SPT.