

Surgery a success

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With the movie "Happy Feet" drawing huge crowds to movie theaters across the country, the Huron Valley area is enjoying its own version these days.

No dancing penguins, of course. But how about a well-known sales representative back on his feet again after undergoing a hip replacement procedure approved a few months ago by the FDA

Bob Peri, automotive sales rep for Gannett, Inc., which owns the Milford Times, recently underwent the Birmingham Hip Resurfacing technique — after suffering for years from arthritis.

His doctor, Philip Schmitt, DO, an orthopedic surgeon with Huron Valley-Sinai Hospital and Specialists in Orthopedic Surgery, is one of 32 surgeons in the United States trained so far to perform the procedure.

The specialized surgery has been offered in other countries for many years. Since making its way into the United States, about 500 patients have opted for it here.

The Birmingham Hip Resurfacing technique is an alternative to traditional hip replacement surgery, which typically requires a large amount of bone to accommodate the prosthetic hip. Instead, the new technique minimizes bone loss and is much like capping a tooth, Schmitt explained, making it more appropriate for younger patients.

Just six weeks after his surgery at Huron Valley-Sinai Hospital in Commerce, Peri is thrilled to be back on the job and exercising regularly.

"I feel great," said Peri, 54. "The new hip is just about healed, and any discomfort I have is a little achiness from the muscles — just because I'm working them."

Peri added that the only physical restriction Schmitt gave him was no running for about a year. "And that's fine with me," he said. "I'm not anxious to go out and do that anyway."

What Peri was anxious to do was return to the active lifestyle he enjoyed before the pain of arthritis interfered and limited his ability to golf and enjoy walks with his wife, and left him in agony at the end of each work day.

Now, that goal is clearly in sight.

"I'm feeling pretty normal now — and I'm getting back in the groove," he said.

Peri spent three days in the hospital following the hip resurfacing. Post surgery pain was minimal, he said, and easily alleviated with medication. His surgical incision measured eight inches and required 33 staples to close.

The two weeks that followed his operation were the most challenging, Peri said, as he healed from the procedure and slowly began to regain his strength.

"It's a little humbling because you are at the mercy of your loved ones. You're not completely helpless, but close to," he said.

Still, Peri has absolutely no regrets over his decision to have the surgery. "Never once did I think, 'why did I do this?' I just kept my focus positive and knew it would be so much better in the end," he said.

And is it?

"Omigod, yes, there's no question about it," he said. "For so many years I had pain in that joint, and now there is literally no pain at all."

Schmitt said Peri is healing wonderfully — as expected. He said Peri's full muscle strength and endurance should be back in about a month. "He's doing very, very well. And that's typical for people who have this procedure," he said.

Based on consultations with medical associations and institutions, drug companies, government agencies and health care industry leaders, USA Weekend Magazine recently named the Birmingham Hip Resurfacing procedure among the 13 most exciting health breakthroughs today. Peri said he "couldn't agree more."

"And it's unbelievable that there have been just 500 people who've had this operation in the whole U.S. — and I'm one of them," he said.

Schmitt noted that he's pleased to see the technique getting widespread publicity. "I think it's a great way to make people more aware of this," he said.

Some 900 physicians are on a waiting list to learn the procedure, Schmitt added. He's hoping to become a training physician next year, instructing fellow surgeons in order to meet the growing demand for the surgery.

"I'm happy (the Birmingham procedure) is proving to be such a fantastic development for so many people," he said.

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