

DAVID'S STORY

Our son, David, was diagnosed back in February of 2000 – at the age of 15 months – with scoliosis (curvature of the spine). We were referred by our pediatrician to one of the “so-called” top pediatric orthopedic doctors in NY. Unfortunately, the specialist we were referred to told us that the only course of treatment available for David was to have him wear a back brace for 22 hours of every day – probably until he was done growing! Even if he wore the brace as prescribed, there were no guarantees that’s it would prevent his curve from progressing.

We dealt with seeing David in the brace (and with the problems associated with wearing in – skin irritations, digestive troubles, etc.) for a little over three years, when one day I came across an article that offered us a glimmer of hope. The focus of the article was on a relatively new procedure called “Vertebral Body Stapling” that uses titanium staples inserted between the vertebrae of the spine to hold it in place and in many cases, even offer some correction of the curve. The procedure was only being done at one hospital in the country – Shriners Hospital for Children in Philadelphia. The chief of staff there, Dr. Randal Betz, had come up with it. This new procedure was being referred to as something that could be “an alternative to bracing and/or spinal fusion surgery”. In other words once the staples were inserted, the child would no longer have to wear the brace.

On December 23, 2003, almost four years after David’s initial diagnosis, we drove to Philadelphia and finally found someone who could offer us a better alternative for our son. Dr. Betz seemed very happy to be able to help David. He met with us, examined David, took x-rays and determined that our son would, in fact, be a candidate for this procedure. Unlike the doctors we’d seen before, Dr. Betz saw the whole child, not just the spine. He seemed to understand and genuinely believe that there should be something better for a child like David than to have to face the next 8 or 9 years in a back brace for 22 hours of every day, particularly if there was something he could do about it.

So on March 10, 2004, David’s surgery was performed by Dr. Linda D’Andrea, a very trusted and capable colleague of Dr. Betz. David is doing very well over three years post op – and we continue to travel 2-3 times a year to Philadelphia so that David can receive follow up care and monitoring for his scoliosis. Although we have good medical insurance we would not entrust David’s care to anyone except the team at Shriners.

We did not seek our Shriners for their free services – we sought them out for their superior care. Care that just happens to be provided to all children under 18 with many types of serious orthopedic conditions at no cost to the family. In addition, the hospital receives no federal, state or local aid. Everything is paid for by the Shriners Hospital system and their friends and supporters. After what they did for my son – happily, willingly, and not wanting anything in return – how could I not be a supporter of Shriners?

A lot of other hospitals would not even be able to perform the stapling surgery because it would not be covered by insurance since it is still considered “investigational”. At Shriners, since money and insurance are not even an issue, they can focus solely on what’s in the best interest of the child. As they like to say at Shriners “it’s healthcare the way it’s supposed to be”. I believe very strongly in what they do and am proud that they allow me to be a part of it.