

After surgery, Cummaquid boy on mend

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When 11-year-old Nathan Winslow of Cummaquid underwent an innovative surgery for scoliosis in December (see "Young Pioneer: Barnstable boy prepares for innovative scoliosis surgery, Dec. 6, Cape Cod Times), he hoped doctors would be able to straighten the curve in his spine.

As it turned out, physicians who operated on him at Children's Hospital in Boston were able to reduce his curvature from 40 to 25 degrees — enough of an improvement to spring him for now from his hard plastic brace.

Six weeks after his surgery, Nathan was given the all-clear to return to the winter sports he loves, including ice skating and snowboarding.

Nathan's mother, Cara Winslow, hopes that his curve will continue to reduce as he grows and Nathan will be able to avoid spinal fusion surgery in his future. Curves of 20 degrees or less are considered normal.

Nathan was one of the first children to have a procedure called vertebral stapling at a hospital in Massachusetts. Another child was operated on the same day, Dec. 10, at Children's Hospital.

The surgery was pioneered at Shriners Hospital for Children in Philadelphia by Dr. Randal R. Betz, who came to Boston for Nathan's operation. Dr. M. Timothy Hresko of Children's Hospital performed the surgery,

in which vertebrae are stapled together — two at a time — on the side they bow out to force them to straighten..

Prior to the operation, Nathan — a sixth-grader at the Horace Mann School in Hyannis — had to wear a "Boston brace" 23 hours a day. Without surgery, he would have had to wear it until he was 19, his mother said.

Nathan's spine had been curving rapidly, going from 24 degrees this summer to 38 degrees to 40 degrees the day of the surgery, she said. The youngster spent five days in the hospital and returned to school Jan. 2 after Christmas break.

"His back has healed really well, and his scars are minimal," Cara Winslow said. "He will be seen by Dr. Hresko three to four times a year for the rest of his growing years. He'll

be X-rayed to monitor that his spine does not worsen. We are hopeful his curve will reduce even more as he grows. If he could stay at 25 degrees he would be fine."

"This surgery is beneficial to many people with moderate scoliosis," Cara Winslow said. She said Nathan is going to contribute to a new Web site about vertebral body stapling to spread the news about the procedure.

In the meantime, people interested in learning about it can visit an online support group at:

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/staplingsupport/>.

