

Local patient 'a different person' after lateral spine surgery

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EUREKA -- Two days after Charlene Misener had the eXtreme Lateral Interbody Fusion (XLIF) spine surgery, she stood up straight.

"I stood up straight as I hadn't been able to do in months and months," the 73-year-old Eureka woman recalled. "My husband and boys said 'You're not bent over.'

"They walked me over the mirror in my (hospital) room, I looked into the mirror and cried.

"I knew I was a different person."

Misener was hoping the surgery would lessen her back pain and cause her to walk and stand upright again but she thought that would happen only after weeks of post-surgery therapy.

"But I was standing up straight on the third day," she said.

Misener is among Central Illinoisans who have benefited from the new approach to access the lower spine from the side rather than the back or the front, said her surgeon, Dr. John Atwater.

"He's made a new woman out of me," Misener said. "If you had seen me a few months ago, you wouldn't have known it was me. I was hunched over. I couldn't stand up straight. The pain was terrible.

"I have a new outlook on life."

Misener is married to Alan Misener, the Eureka police chief and a retired Peoria policeman. They have seven children, 17 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.



Charlene Misener listens as her daughter checks appointments. Misener, of Eureka, was able to stand up straight and to be pain free for the first time in months after having an eXtreme Lateral Interbody Fusion (XLIF) procedure. (The Pantagraph/CARLOS T. MIRANDA)

“I’ve been in the food and beverage business for many years,” she said. She owned Yesterdays, a restaurant-bar in Peoria, then owned Char’s Diner, a ’50s-’60s diner.

Now she helps her daughter, Tina Propst, at her beauty salon, Tina’s Lasting Impression Salon in Washington. She also helps at a friend’s business, The Brass Key, a neighborhood cocktail lounge in East Peoria.

“I love being busy. I love getting up at 5 o’clock every morning, knowing that I have something to do because somebody needs me,” she said.

About five years ago, Atwater concluded she had degenerative disc disease and needed to have fusion performed at discs one and two in the lower back.

Atwater, an orthopedic spine surgeon based in Bloomington, performed the surgery four years ago using the traditional approach of going in through the back.

“It was a pretty major surgery,” Misener recalled. “I came out of it fine and dandy but was in the hospital for five days.”

She came home with a walker, a quad cane and a back brace, and did about eight weeks of physical therapy at Eureka Community Hospital.

The surgery and therapy were a success and Misener was fine until about a year and a half ago. She began having lower back pain again and had trouble walking and standing up straight.

“It was very painful,” she recalled. “I still did a multitude of things but I was slowing down.”

Discs three and four — the ones above the discs fused earlier — were degenerating.

This time, Atwater wanted to perform XLIF, the less invasive spine surgery that approaches the spine from the side. But Misener didn’t want to go through surgery again.

Finally, last fall, she’d handled as much pain as could. On Nov. 11, Atwater — in collaboration with Dr. Richard Trefzger, a general surgeon — performed the XLIF procedure at BroMenn Regional Medical Center in Normal. Misener remembers waking up to no pain and no problem at the incision site.

“I was absolutely amazed,” she recalled.

Two days later, Misener stood up straight for the first time in months, thanked Atwater and kissed him on the cheek.

“In less than three weeks, I felt like a new woman. I used a cane for three to four weeks because I was told to, but I didn’t need it.

“Would I do it (the XLIF surgery) again? Absolutely.”

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