

Patient Testimonial



Nanci, XLIF® Patient

For over twenty years, fifty-five year-old Nanci has worked as a Surgical Technologist in a busy OR. Although her job can be physically demanding and keeps her on her feet all day, Nanci is passionate about her career. When Nanci is not working in the OR, she enjoys numerous activities, such as spending time with her family, skiing, hiking, gardening... the list goes on.

Nanci, however, was not always able to participate in so many activities. In 2001, she started suffering from lower back and leg pain. "The lower back pain started first, especially in damp weather," recalls Nanci. "Then I had both back and leg pain, even at night. The leg pain was chronic." Slowly, the pain began interfering with Nanci's everyday life. "I couldn't comfortably pick up my grandchildren," explains Nanci. "I love walking and I used to walk every day. I couldn't even do that anymore." Nanci also had to cut back on her hours spent in the OR, and eventually worked only three days per week.

Determined to find relief from her back and leg pain, Nanci made an appointment with Dr. Anthony Salerni, a neurosurgeon practicing at the Orthopedic Professional Association in Gilford, NH. Dr. Salerni ordered an MRI for Nanci and diagnosed her with degenerative spondylolisthesis, a condition in which one vertebra has slipped forward over another, resulting in instability and painful pinching of the nerves.

Dr. Salerni prescribed conservative nonsurgical treatments for Nanci, that were used more or less successfully for five years. These include physical therapy, water therapy, and over-the-counter pain medication. Nanci also had two series of steroid injections that provided her with some relief from the pain. "By Christmas of 2005 I felt great," says Nanci. Then, a few weeks later, Nanci was involved in a rear-end motor vehicle collision.

After the accident, Nanci's pain escalated and became almost unbearable. Given Nanci's condition, Dr. Salerni recommended that she consider having surgery. Nanci had previously heard about a minimally disruptive spine procedure called XLIF (eXtreme Lateral Interbody Fusion) at a medical convention that she had attended and told Dr. Salerni that that was the procedure she wanted to have. "I work in surgery and I've assisted with back surgery," says Nanci. "Because of my background, I knew exactly how minimally disruptive the XLIF procedure could be. It is so much better than other procedures."

Unlike typical spine surgery approaches, the XLIF procedure, developed by NuVasive®, accesses the spine laterally, through the patient's side. This minimally disruptive procedure allows the surgeon to access the anterior side of the spine, while avoiding the abdominal incision of an anterior approach, and XLIF does not require dissection or retraction of the sensitive back muscles, bones, or ligaments that is typical of traditional posterior approaches. This means that compared with traditional procedures, XLIF provides patients with benefits including minimal scarring, reduced postoperative pain, shorter hospital stay, and faster return to normal activity.

On May 8, 2007, Dr. Salerni performed a one-level XLIF procedure on Nanci and she was walking soon after the surgery. Nanci was discharged from the hospital on day three and only needed to take minimal medication. She experienced some pain after having surgery, but it was different than the pain from which

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she had previously suffered. "My pain was uncomfortable, but not unmanageable," recalls Nanci. "It lasted for about one week." Soon after, Nanci stopped taking pain medication and started doing physical therapy, water therapy, and exercise to facilitate her recovery. She also began walking for pleasure again.

Today, Nanci is pain-free other than occasional minor muscle aches. Not only has she returned to work full-time, but she is also participating in activities that her back pain would have prevented her from prior to surgery. "I can garden now without a problem," states Nanci. "I'm hiking now, no problem. I can do a five mile hike." Recently Nanci even played in an annual volleyball 'parent vs. daughter' match against her daughter's team. "I couldn't participate for the last couple of years," says Nanci. "This year, I played for two hours and I had no pain! Just to be part of that was great."

Nanci's quality of life has significantly improved due to the XLIF procedure, Dr. Salerni's excellent care, and her dedication to her recovery. "I feel bad for anyone who has back pain," explains Nanci. "I'm truly grateful to have had this. I'd recommend XLIF to anyone in my situation who is a candidate for the procedure. I had wonderful results, and I'm happy I had it!"

As with any spine surgery, there are potential benefits and possible risks associated with the XLIF procedure. It is important that you discuss the potential risks, complications, and benefits of XLIF with your doctor prior to receiving treatment, and that you rely on your physician's judgment. Only your doctor can determine whether you are a suitable candidate for this treatment. You can find a surgeon in your area who performs the XLIF procedure by utilizing the Physician Locator on www.lateralaccess.org.