

regenerative medicine

REDUCES PAIN, PROMOTES HEALING, PROVIDES HOPE



KATIE WEBSTER still remembers hearing her right knee pop.

She was out for a walk with a friend one fall day in 2017. After her knee popped, it felt strangely warm, then bombarded by sharp pain. A determined Webster limped the last two blocks to her home in West Fargo, N.D. The following day, at the urging of her husband, Tom, and coworkers, she went to an orthopedic walk-in clinic in Fargo.

And after that, everything spiraled downward, Webster says.

Over the years her right knee had become increasingly prone to pain and swelling, and she had received a cortisone injection earlier that summer. Tests revealed Webster's knee had osteoarthritis. Without treatment, Webster would need a total knee replacement in five years. And she wasn't even 40.

According to the Arthritis Foundation, 2 million Americans younger than 45 have symptomatic osteoarthritis in their knees.

Webster refused pain medication. As the American Red Cross regional disaster officer for Dakotas Region and a mother of three boys, the youngest was 4 at the time, she felt she couldn't afford to be groggy. Her knee pain added stress to an already grueling schedule of up to 12-hour work days either on her feet or sitting in meetings, with her leg elevated, orchestrating crisis efforts.

In less than a year, Webster underwent three more cortisone injections, physical therapy and a lubrication injection. And still, she battled pain, swelling and stiffness. Yet, she didn't want to be the mom who slowed down her sons in family activities. "I just sucked it up, kept trucking through and paying the consequences at night when I would put my leg up and feel throbbing pain," she says.

Despite her determination, life became increasingly difficult. Webster often could not find a comfortable sleeping position, and the pain often roused her out of a dead sleep. She decided against arthroscopy because it did not offer permanent pain relief. With limited options, Webster became discouraged.

Then, in May 2018, her husband's best friend told her about a new experimental treatment that had helped him: stem cell therapy. He explained regenerative medicine is usually not covered by insurance plans. Even so, Webster made an appointment at the Center for Pain Medicine in Fargo to meet with Dr. Majid Ghazi, a board-certified anesthesiologist and interventional pain physician.

"Dr. Ghazi was the only one to assure me," Webster says. "I was impressed with the confidence he had, and he answered all my questions."

Ghazi founded the Center for Pain Medicine in 2014 to promote the development and practice of safe, high-quality and cost-effective interventional pain management procedures for diagnosis and treatment of spine and joint-related pain disorders.

Unlike cortisone injections or surgery, stem cell therapy immediately stimulates the new growth of cartilage, tendons, ligaments, bone and fibrous connective tissues. And patients experience a reduction in pain in four to six weeks.

"Regenerative medicine has the potential to change traditional medicine and replace cortisone injections or even surgery," Ghazi says.

Webster regards the out-of-pocket expenses as an investment toward her body. Her husband agreed, encouraging her to move forward with the procedure. "He hated seeing me in so much pain," Webster says.

Adult stem cells are extracted from pelvic bone marrow, processed in a centrifuge, and then re-injected into your damaged joint under X-ray or ultrasound. Ghazi performs the out-patient procedure in the center's in-house operating room in a sterile environment. Patients are under intravenous sedation, known as conscious sedation.

Webster underwent the procedure on Friday, June 29, 2018, and returned to work the following Monday, experiencing some tenderness near the extraction site. She completed physical therapy to strengthen the muscles supporting her right knee. Within three weeks, Webster's right knee was significantly better.

"Your own body can heal itself," she says. "You are guaranteed you will be injected with your own body biologics."

Today, Webster not only walks without fear of popping, but she also runs. And she keeps up with her sons and husband in family walks and bike rides. It's the small things Webster appreciates, such as not needing to wear pants large enough to fit over her swollen knee on date night with Tom.

"I didn't go in expecting to receive an 18-year-old knee, but it has definitely exceeded my expectations," Webster says.

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