

Texas Spine & Scoliosis

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Educational online encyclopedia on spine at: TexasSpineandScoliosis.com

Retired microbiologist returns to activity after spine tumor removal

SHELLEY started having severe lower back pain and muscle spasms in December 2011. “It felt like a lightning strike to my spine.” The symptoms were intermittent, they would come and go. “Nearly every night I would wake up with the horrible pain,” Shelley remembers.

She went to her orthopedic surgeon to find out the cause of her problem. The surgeon referred her to a spine specialist. After her visit with the specialist, it still wasn’t clear what was causing her symptoms. Meanwhile, Shelley continued to experience the sudden and severe lower back pain symptoms. She was afraid to leave the house because she never knew when the symptoms would return.

Her daughter learned about Dr. Enrique Pena at Texas Spine and Scoliosis Center in Austin. Shelley wanted desperately to return to her normal lifestyle — so she made an appointment with Dr. Pena. At her appointment with Dr. Pena, a fellowship-trained interventional spine specialist, the doctor reviewed a recent MRI of Shelley’s spine. Unfortunately, the MRI did not reveal the problem.

Dr. Pena suggested that Shelley first try injection therapy to help relieve her pain. The injections did not relieve Shelley’s symptoms; she still required daily pain medication for her lower back symptoms.

She returned to Dr. Pena to see what other options were available. To ensure Dr. Pena was viewing a high quality MRI of Shelley’s spine, he ordered an MRI be taken at Texas Spine and Scoliosis. Dr. Pena reviewed the new MRI and the results revealed that Shelley had a schwannoma, or a nerve sheath tumor. This type of tumor is usually benign. Dr. Pena discussed the MRI results with Shelley and referred her to Dr. John Stokes, a fellowship-trained spine neurosurgeon at Texas Spine and Scoliosis with specialization in treating spine tumors. The neurosurgeon explained to Shelley that because the tumor was causing her pain, it would be necessary to remove the schwannoma to relieve her symptoms. “Dr. Stokes was wonderful, he explained to me in detail about the tumor and helped me understand what to expect before and after the removal,” Shelley says.

Dr. Stokes removed the tumor and the surgery was a success — Shelley no longer had any of the lower back pain she experienced before surgery. While removing the nerve sheath tumor, a nerve was clipped and caused Shelley to lose some function in her right leg after surgery. Shelley started physical therapy while in the hospital to help regain full mobility in her leg, and continues with therapy.

Shelley is thankful to be more active now. She enjoys time with her family and friends once again. Shelley drives her teenage grandchildren to various activities, this helps her daughter out. She also enjoys lunch dates with her friends. “Before my surgery — I was basically housebound because of fear of when my symptoms would return and how they would affect me. That time of my life is in the past,” Shelley says.

More information related to spine conditions is on our website, TexasSpineandScoliosis.com. Request a copy of our 36-page Home Remedy Book by calling us at (512) 324-3580.



Today, Shelley is back to a more active lifestyle. She is free to enjoy the outdoors and spend time with family and friends once again.

