

New surgery impressive in speedy recovery

Five hours after Dr. Robert Gorab made an incision nearly 5 inches in the top of my right thigh and took out my arthritic right hip to replace it with a titanium and ceramic version, I was walking down the hall at St. Joseph Hospital.

With a walker, of course.

I wasn't setting any records and I hear that walking that soon after surgery is fairly routine. Still I was impressed.

And I've been walking every day since then. In fact, now I walk around the house on my own or outside with a cane and only occasionally use the walker.

Gory details:

Somehow they got me on what looked like the world's smallest operating table and stuck my feet in "ski" boots. The anesthesiologist said I might feel a sting. I said I didn't feel anything and woke up in the recovery room.

Using his special operating table, Dr. Gorab had rotated my leg different directions to enable him to remove the right hip bone without cutting through muscle or tendon. It's called the "anterior approach" and is a fairly new procedure.

The anterior approach to hip replacement technically is more difficult than the traditional approach, he says, but "once you learn it and you're comfortable with it, it's pretty straight forward. It's a matter of repetition."

He used X-Rays to make sure all the components were in the right position and to make sure the legs are equal.

The entire procedure was done in 45 to 60 minutes.

I had a private room in the hospital — St. Joseph's is such a popular orthopedic hospital there's an entire floor for patient recovery and all rooms are private. I had a TV, computer keyboard, in-room dining menu, the option of having friends join me for meals or even sleep on the adjacent couch.

Before I could start to really enjoy myself, they kicked me out. Two days after surgery.

The upside:

I've been at the keyboard, checking my e-mails, since day one.

Five days after surgery, I climbed into an electric cart and tooted around [Wal-Mart](#). On the sixth day, I pushed my own grocery cart up and down a few aisles. By day 10, I could do the entire grocery store, using the cart as a walker.

Honest evaluation:

Pain? From the incision. Tolerable with medication.

"This usually is a surgery that has a quick recovery," Gorab says. "You might have a few aches for six to 12 weeks."

The hospital's home health department sends nurses and therapists as needed.

A few precautions:

I had to learn to monitor pain medication. Too much too often put me to sleep.

And the pain medication stopped a regular daily function, requiring some over-the-counter stuff to return to regularity.

Plus some additional observations:

This is real surgery. The incision really hurts. Yes, it's important to move around — even when it hurts.

I do expect to be on my own soon. Gorab says about three weeks of therapy is all I will need. I have daily exercises — strengthening leg and thigh muscles and helping with balance.

But my weeks of aqua therapy, improving balance overall, had already strengthened some of those muscles. That's the real reason I was able to move ahead so quickly.

"You have the strength and agility I usually only see in my younger patient group," said physical therapist Monica Mattias.

Ah, I never equated lifting my leg off the bed with feeling younger again.

Isn't it interesting how our priorities change over the years?