

Jupiter man joyous over his 'minimally invasive' surgery

BY GWEN GARDEN

SPECIAL TO THE COURIER NEWSWEEKLY

A gigantic smile crossed Charles Brower's face as he opened the door of his Piper Cub and hoisted himself into the left seat. Pre-flight completed and seatbelt fastened, the engine roared to life.

Moments later the 69-year-old Jupiter resident piloted the plane down the runway and into the skies for a little recreational flying.

It was a good day.

No.

Actually, it was a great day. And a remarkable one, too.

What made it great was that it was the first time in 50 years that Brower, who injured his back while in the Air Force, had been free of back pain. What made it remarkable was the fact that just six days earlier he had had back surgery.

"Words cannot describe how happy I was to be able to get in and out of my plane so easily," he said. "I hadn't felt that good since 1964."

Brower had avoided addressing his back problem even though over the years it had become excruciating to do many of the things he loved such as bike riding, walking and flying. He was too put off by horror stories about undesirable surgical outcomes and extended recoveries.

He finally had enough one day, however, when he picked up a basket full of laundry, threw out his back and had trouble getting up from the floor.

That's when a friend told him about a local doctor doing minimally invasive surgery (MIS).

MIS is a specialty type of surgery that uses a small incision and real-time x-ray guidance to get to the affected areas of the spine without cutting through muscle.

It's the destruction of the normal, healthy structures of the back that makes recovery from conventional spinal surgery so tedious, painful and drawn out, noted Michael Gleiber, M.D. Dr. Gleiber is a board certified spine surgeon in Jupiter who performed Brower's surgery at Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center on March 13.

By spreading the muscle apart with a retractor to create a "surgical window" instead of cutting into it, the incision can be smaller (1 1/2 "compared to 6-7").



PROVIDED PHOTO/PALM BEACH GARDENS MEDICAL CENTER

From left is Charles Brower, who underwent MIS after 50 years of back agony, with his surgeon Michael Gleiber, M.D.

There's also less blood loss, a decreased risk of infection and significantly reduced post-operative pain (meaning less pain medication).

Brower was up and walking within an hour and a half of the conclusion of his procedure, took no pain medication other than Tylenol and checked out of the hospital the following day.

"There are a lot of horror stories about back surgery, but those of us on the forefront of spinal surgery are doing it very differently than we did even five years ago and very differently from other surgeons who aren't necessarily using the most up-to-date techniques," said Dr. Gleiber.

He warns patients to carefully check out their surgeon before agreeing to go under the knife to be sure they are board certified spine surgeons and not simply surgeons performing the kind of surgery that can often lead to complications, a long recovery and a less-than-desirable outcome.

"With true minimally invasive surgery, you shouldn't have to stay in the hospital for 10-12 days, have extensive physical therapy and donate blood ahead of time to cover potential excessive blood loss during surgery," he noted.

Less than a month after Brower flew his airplane he and his wife walked the Great Wall of China. He said he climbed those very steep steps all the way to the top without any pain whatsoever.

"Thanks to this surgery I got my life back," Brower said. "I'm so thrilled that if Dr. Gleiber was a woman, I'd kiss him!"

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