

No longer a Prisoner to pain

The following story relates the experience of one person who is receiving neurostimulation therapy for the management of chronic pain. As you read it, please bear in mind that the experiences are specific to this particular person. Results vary; not every response is the same.

“Recently, my wife and I drove to San Francisco,” Manuel Castañeda, 50, reported. “While visiting Alcatraz, I was able to walk—without pain—up and down the steep hills and steps.”

He proudly described his improved level of function some 2 years after the surgical implantation of the Synergy® neurostimulator system by Dr. Andrew Hesselstine, Pain Management Specialist and Medical Director of the Hallmark Surgery Center in San Bernardino, California.

“Before my implant, I never would have been able to ride seven hours in the car, and I avoided stairs as much as possible,” he explained.

Like the inmates who had been confined at the former penitentiary, Mr. Castañeda considered himself a prisoner to his pain. He had been unable to participate in regular activities, such as grocery shopping with his wife, playing sports with his sons, or walking for more than 15 minutes. “I became depressed, grouchy. My family felt I was unapproachable. I was taking four to six tablets of Vicodin® [500 mg, hydrocodone/APAP] a day, along with other medications.”

Mr. Castañeda’s back injury, caused by an industrial accident

two years of post-operative back and bilateral leg pain associated with Failed Back Surgery Syndrome (FBSS). Treatment for pain included conventional medical management (CMM): prescription pain medications, physical therapy, water therapy, neuroblocks, and injections.

When Dr. Hesselstine suggested neurostimulator systems as a possible treatment alternative, Mr. Castañeda was interested.

“We chose the non-rechargeable Synergy system,” said Dr. Hesselstine. “Although many patients may prefer a rechargeable device, a non-rechargeable system may still be better for patients who require less usage and less frequency than amplitude—in other words, less of a need for power,” said Dr. Hesselstine. He added that “patients who are not tech-savvy or are worried about implant depth might also prefer a non-rechargeable.”

“Results from this patient’s trial period in October 2003, showed that he had 80% relief of pain and improved function, so he wanted to move forward. This patient had the social support and motivation. He understood how the device worked and had a realistic outcome expectation,” Dr. Hesselstine explained.

“Two months after the surgery, I felt 90-95% back to normal,” said Mr. Castañeda. “I began to increase my activities and wean myself off of some of the medications. The day I felt good enough to take my sons golfing, my wife cried, knowing that I was returning to my old self.”

Ten months after the Synergy was implanted, he began vocational rehabilitation. He is now a house appraiser, a job that requires him to be on the go frequently. “I still have pain in my leg, but ibuprofen or only one Vicodin® a day is usually enough. My life has turned around 180 degrees since the implant.”

Neurostimulation systems have evolved dramatically over the past five years, giving patients more options. They are now smaller, have longer-lasting batteries—both rechargeable or non-rechargeable—and can provide broader pain coverage.

“The technology is advancing rapidly. Medtronic has recently developed the exclusive mySTIM® diary, patient programmer and trialing system to provide a detailed roadmap to success. By proactively determining the appropriate parameters and device, mySTIM assists me in providing a positive patient outcome,” said Dr. Hesselstine.

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Manuel Castañeda



Dr. Andrew Hesselstine



in 2001, led to surgery 18 months later to fuse three adjacent discs. The surgery resulted in damage to his S1 nerve, leaving numbness on his left side from the waist down. He suffered