

# PROCEDURE SPOTLIGHT

# A NEW APPROACH TO HIP REPLACEMENT

New techniques and methods often mean Total Joint Center patients can be up and about the day of surgery

By Linda Davis

Whether you've slipped on a newly mopped floor, been bucked from a bronco or simply been overtaken by Father Time, the good news is that hip and other joint replacements aren't the ordeal they used to be.

At St. Mary's Total Joint Center, patients have Dr. William McGann to thank for staying ahead of the curve on innovations in the field, and even inventing procedures designed to dramatically reduce healing times.

Instead of the three-week hospital stays common 20 years ago, hip replacement patients at St. Mary's are often up and moving around the day of surgery. Their average hospital stay is two or three days.

One reason is better balance in the use of pain medication, so that recovering patients are not so groggy. Their pain is controlled, but not to the point that it inhibits all mobility. "We are surprised how well they can do," says McGann.

The Total Joint Center specializes in knee, hip and shoulder surgeries, so patients can expect boutique care. It's a concept McGann borrowed from a hospital he visited in Washington state. "There was evidence that if you focus the team and expertise in replacement, you get better outcomes," he says.

As chief of orthopedics at St. Mary's, McGann was perfectly positioned to take the idea and run with it, opening the Total Joint Center three years ago.

McGann and fellow orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jennifer van Warmerdam now perform hip and other joint replacements on 10 to 15 patients per week. They are assisted by two other part-time surgeons when necessary.

McGann and van Warmerdam are both experts in their field.

McGann received his medical degree from New



York Medical College and spent two years training in general surgery at the UC Irvine Medical Center. He came to the Bay Area in 1979 to participate in the San Francisco Orthopedic Residency Program at St. Mary's Medical Center. He then completed a fellowship in adult hip reconstruction at Massachusetts General Hospital under the direction of Dr. William Harris, the "father" of total hip replacement surgery.

McGann has designed six unique hip implants over the years as new materials become available or new techniques were developed.

In June, he is publishing an article about a new procedure he developed to reduce hip dislocation rates to almost zero, he says.

McGann has high praise for his colleague. Van Warmerdam "is passionate about excellent care," he says. "You could not find a more caring person"

Both he and van Warmerdam are adept at the anterior approach to hip replacement surgery. With this technique, surgeons work through a small incision in front of the hip, going between the muscles rather than cutting through them. Because surgeons spare the muscles, patients do not need to limit their movements as much during the recovery period. They can bend or cross their legs, and the time necessary for a cane or walker is reduced.

According to a March 18 New York Times article, anterior hip replacement has gained popularity since it was introduced 10 years ago. About 20 percent of hip surgeons are using the technique, up from "less than a handful" in 2005.

Because McGann and van Warmerdam are able to focus exclusively on joint surgeries, their success rates are high, they say. "Conceptually (surgeons) get good at what they do," says McGann. "Team members get together about patients and expectations are worked out ahead of time."

The Total Joint Center has performed 480 hip replacements since it opened.

Patients come from all walks of life. "We have cowboys and ranch hands come to us from the Central Valley in their pickup trucks and cowboy boots," says McGann.

Marin resident Pamela Treadway, 56, had the anterior-approach hip surgery last August and was back teaching Zumba classes in 27 days, she says.

"The whole experience at St. Mary's was phenomenal," says Treadway. "I had a private room and felt like a mini-star for a couple of days. Everyone was so nice and encouraging through the entire process."

McGann says excellent communication, expertise and consistency are the key to maintaining the Total Joint Center's high reputation. Another factor is its emphasis on patient education. Registered nurse Bonnie Cavanaugh conducts free classes twice a month for prospective patients and caregivers who want to learn what to expect.

Treadway said she did lots of research before her procedure. "I wanted to find a surgeon who not only had done the anterior approach, but who had done a lot of them. From start to finish, (St. Mary's) went above and beyond the highest expectations I could have had." ■

