

Making Headlines

NEWS RELEASE

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Disc Replacement Study Holds Hope for Back Pain

Towson, MD -- A new disc replacement technique that could bring relief for thousands of back pain patients is being studied by surgeons at St. Joseph Medical Center. For thousands of back pain sufferers, it is an injured disc in their lower spine that causes the discomfort. Although these problems are often treated through physical therapy and medication, surgery is indicated for about 10% of these patients.

Until now, that surgery meant one of two options: removing the disc from the spinal column and fusing two vertebrae together with rods and pins or removing the disc, placing a cage-like device in its place, infusing the surrounding bones with the device. Either way, although the pain is often lessened, that particular part of the patient's spine becomes immobile.

Enter the newest hope: Disc Replacement Surgery. In this procedure, the patient's injured disc is removed and an artificial disc is implanted. The artificial disc operates in a similar manner to the patient's own disc and is like the artificial knees or hips patients receive in joint replacement surgery. The hope of the newest technique is that patients would be able to experience "normal" movement following surgery. Not only will the patient maintain the mobility of the vertebrae, but also the strain and damage which fusion causes on the adjacent discs hopefully will be eliminated.

Although the disc replacement technique has been successfully performed on nearly 2,000 European patients, clinical trials on the device have just begun in the United States. **Paul McAfee, M.D., and Ira Fedder, M.D., members of Orthopedic Associates and Co-Directors of the Spine and Scoliosis Center at St. Joseph Medical Center,** worked with general surgeons to perform only the third such disc replacement in the country at St. Joseph on March 24. The doctors were chosen to participate in this groundbreaking study because of their reputation for research excellence. More than 500 patients will be enrolled in the randomized study over five years.