Eisenhower Surgeon First in the Valley To Perform Total Spinal Disc Replacement

(Left to right) Armen Khachatryan, MD, and Karen Cleary, PA, assist Amir Tahernia, MD, with placement of the CHARITE Artificial Disc.

Beatriz Zamora, 35 years old, suffered excruciating pain, spasms, weakness and fatigue as a result of a tear at the L5 disc in her spine. The longest amount of time Zamora could tolerate walking, was 15 minutes, after which time she had to sit down. Given the decreased mobility of lumbar fusion, Zamora didn't feel particularly hopeful about her options.

Thanks to a procedure being performed at Eisenhower Medical Center, there is a new alternative when seeking relief from lumbar degenerative disc disease (DDD). The CHARITE™ Artificial Disc is a new Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved (October 2004) device that treats severe low back pain by replacing a damaged or worn out spinal disc with an artificial one. While artificial replacements are commonly used in hips and knees, this was the first FDA approval of such a device for spinal discs.

Eisenhower's David Tahernia, MD, Board Certified, fellowship-trained Orthopedic Spinal Surgeon at Desert Orthopedic Center was the first physician in the Coachella Valley to use this motionpreserving technology. "Patients will have dramatic relief from pain as a result of this new technology, and for the first time we can also preserve motion," says Dr. Tahernia, who performed the surgery on October 21, 2005. Beatriz Zamora was Dr. Tahernia's patient and the valley's first recipient of the CHARITE™ Artificial Disc. Pleased with the results, she is quick to relay her enthusiasm. "Don't let anyone tell you not to do something like this. Don't be afraid. Just do it."

Lumbar degenerative disc disease is a common disc disorder affecting more than 10 million persons. It occurs when spinal discs deteriorate, usually as a result of natural aging, daily stress or injury. MRI scans have documented that approximately 30 percent of 30-year-olds have signs of disc degeneration, even though they have no back pain symptoms. While nearly 80 percent of adults experience low back pain and never need surgery, people with severe DDD — about one to two percent of people with low back pain — can become incapacitated by limited motion and significant pain. In the past, a patient's only surgical alternative would have been lumbar fusion, a surgery in which discs are fused, limiting mobility, and sometimes placing more stress on the surrounding discs.

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