

UPMC Passavant Spine Center: A One-Stop Shop for the Treatment of Spine Problems



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If you've ever experienced back or neck pain, you know how debilitating it can be. The UPMC Passavant Spine Center—located in the UPMC Outpatient Center in Wexford—brings together a multidisciplinary team of specialists to provide the comprehensive care you need in one convenient location.

Since its opening in 2015, the UPMC Passavant Spine Center has drawn a wide range of specialists together under one roof to treat patients. The upcoming late spring addition of neurologists rounds out a comprehensive team of experts that includes neurosurgeons, physiatrists, physical therapists, pain management specialists, and diagnostic imaging specialists.

"It means seamless services for our patients," says Matt El-Kadi, MD, PhD, FACS, chief of neurosurgery at UPMC Passavant and director of the UPMC Passavant Spine Center, which he helped establish. "All the resources they need will be right here in one location for diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. Our specialists work hand-in-hand to provide quality patient care quickly and easily, with the goal of achieving optimum outcomes."

The UPMC Outpatient Center in Wexford is especially convenient for patients who need to see more than one expert, says Dr. El-Kadi. Multiple appointments can be scheduled on the same day, saving them numerous trips to see different doctors for the same problem.

MEDICAL AND SURGICAL TREATMENT OPTIONS

The majority of patients who seek treatment for back and neck pain don't require a surgical procedure, says Robert Bailey, MD, one of four neurosurgeons seeing patients at the Spine Center.

"More than 85 percent of patients can be treated with conservative measures, including physical therapy, anti-inflammatory medicine, and injections," says Dr. Bailey. "We try to find a way to alleviate pain, weakness, or numbness without surgery."

Having other services and experts available at the outpatient center location makes it easy to get a diagnostic x-ray or MRI, or consult with other specialists on the best treatment approach.



UPMC Outpatient Center in Wexford

"We can just walk down the hallway to confer with a colleague about a patient," says Dr. Bailey. "That relationship is valuable and key to providing the best and most appropriate care."

ADVANCED PROCEDURES

Back and spine pain doesn't always equal surgery. But when surgery is needed, the Spine Center's neurosurgeons are experts in minimally invasive and advanced surgical approaches.

"We start with the least invasive approach to relieve pain, restore function, and improve mobility," says Dr. El-Kadi.

All spine surgeries are performed at UPMC Passavant's surgical pavilion in McCandless, where three state-of-the-art operating rooms are used exclusively for spinal surgery. The pavilion features spacious, private rooms for patients requiring an overnight stay.

SPINE SURGERY SUCCESS STORIES

Wendy Christensen was used to having back pain; it was something she'd lived with for nearly a decade. But last fall, the problem got worse. Much worse.

"It was awful," says Wendy, 45, a financial analyst. "I could barely sit. I had tingling, numbness, and excruciating pain in my left buttock, thigh, and calf."

Her stand-by treatments—physical therapy and chiropractic adjustments—no longer helped. Neither did the oral steroids prescribed by her primary care doctor. Desperate for relief, she searched the internet for a spine specialist and found Dr. El-Kadi.

Within a week, she had an appointment with him at the Spine Center. An MRI confirmed his initial diagnosis: a herniated disc in her lower back with leaked disc material pressing onto the sciatic nerve leading to her leg.

Wendy, the mother of two young children, initially opted for a conservative approach: epidural steroid injections administered by a pain management specialist. "I was nervous about having back surgery and the recovery time," she says. "But Dr. El-Kadi was great; he never pressured me."

At her follow-up appointment in January, however, Wendy told him she was ready for surgery. "I was in so much pain. I needed relief," she says. On Jan. 20 at UPMC Passavant in McCandless, Dr. El-Kadi performed a microdiscectomy, a minimally invasive procedure to remove the herniated disc material pressing on the nerve.

"The relief was immediate! The excruciating pain I felt for three months was gone," says Wendy. "I'm so grateful to Dr. El-Kadi. He did an amazing job. I have so much to look forward to now and I can't wait to be active again."



At first, Larry Campbell thought he had slept wrong when he woke up with a kink in his neck and numbness in his fingers. But as the pain worsened and his movements became increasingly restricted, the New Castle resident recognized the all-too-familiar symptoms of a cervical disc problem—the same problem he had corrected surgically over two decades earlier while living in Oregon.

"I knew what was happening. They were the exact same symptoms," says Larry, 61. He promptly went to his family doctor, who sent him to Dr. El-Kadi. An MRI confirmed he had another bulging disc in his neck.

Larry tried physical therapy for three weeks before deciding on surgery. "I was ready," he says. "I couldn't stand the pain anymore. It was like having a 500-pound gorilla on my shoulder."

The surgery performed at UPMC Passavant in March 2018 was complicated. Dr. El-Kadi removed the old fusion in the C5-C6 spinal segment and damaged disks in C4 and 7—a procedure known as a cervical discectomy—followed by a fusion to stabilize the spine.

"The pain was gone—gone!—immediately," says Larry. The retired corrections officer chose to take it easy in the year following his surgery. But now he looks forward to fishing and playing softball again.

"I tell anyone who's suffering from back or neck problems that there's no reason to live with the pain. Go see UPMC's experts at the Spine Center!"

The information in this article was provided by UPMC.