

Freedom to Move

Jersey Shore University Medical Center Complex spine surgery repaired a serious injury and helped a patient avoid permanent paralysis.

LAST SUMMER, PATTI MARRA, 60, OF TANNERSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA, WAS looking forward to spending a relaxing weekend at the Jersey Shore. While staying with family at the shore, her plans took a drastic turn when she slipped and fell. She felt excruciating pain in her neck and went to the local emergency department, where an X-ray showed that everything appeared to be fine.

Over the weekend, however, her pain became progressively worse. "Every time I moved it sent an electric shock through my whole body," Patti says. She also lost feeling in her left hand. Her sister-in-law suggested they go to the Emergency Department at Jersey Shore University Medical Center, where Patti had a CT scan.

Facing the Risks

"Patti's CT scan showed that she fractured and dislocated her cervical spine and it was compressing her spinal cord, causing her to become paralyzed," says **Ramil Bhatnagar, M.D.**, an orthopedic spine surgeon at Jersey Shore and part of **Meridian Orthopedics**.

For many years, Patti has had a type of arthritis called ankylosing spondylitis, which made her injury even more complex. "The condition causes the vertebrae to fuse together like a brittle broomstick," Dr. Bhatnagar says. "This made surgery more risky



Ramil Bhatnagar, M.D.
Board certified in
Orthopedic Surgery
Manasquan
800-560-9990

because we don't have the normal landmarks for placing screws and putting everything back into a perfect position to function. Patients with ankylosing spondylitis are at greater risk for paralysis and bleeding."

Since Patti was already starting to become paralyzed, she had no choice but to undergo surgery. In addition to fracturing her neck, the injury and her condition caused her head and neck to become dislocated from her spine. During surgery, Dr. Bhatnagar would have to realign her head, neck, and spine, and repair the broken bones. He hoped it would also relieve the pressure on her spinal cord and reverse the paralysis she was already experiencing.

"When I first met Dr. Bhatnagar, he had a confidence and a calmness about him that made me feel like I could trust him," she says. "He didn't sugarcoat the risks. As scary as they were, I knew he'd do everything he could to fix me."

In the Nick of Time

Patti had surgery that same day. "With spinal cord injuries, the longer we wait, the greater the risk that a patient could permanently lose function," Dr. Bhatnagar says. "We have a spine trauma team, including spine surgeons, anesthesiologists, physician assistants, nurses, X-ray techs, and others that we assembled right away." Thanks to Dr. Bhatnagar's expertise and the support of his team, the surgery was a success.

Today, Patti has made a full recovery. "Even though I was away from home, I never felt like an outsider at Jersey Shore," she says. "I'm so grateful that I wound up at Jersey Shore and that he was my surgeon. Dr. Bhatnagar knew exactly what to do."

After a fall that caused her to dislocate her cervical spine, Patti Marra received expert care at Jersey Shore that helped her get back on her feet.



Spinal Care at Its Best



At Meridian Health, we've put our heart into building a state-of-the-art network of spine services to help people like you. Read more about our comprehensive spine services and expert multi-disciplinary teams at MeridianHealth.com/Spine.