

ASK YOUR DOCTOR

New Hope For Patients With Spinal Fractures

(NAPSA)—Elizabeth Pottinger was gardening in her backyard when one stroke of a tool to hard soil sent a sharp pain through her back and rendered her nearly immobile. Osteoporosis had caused her bones to become so weak and brittle that everyday activities, such as gardening, became more difficult than usual. Elizabeth's pain, she later discovered, was caused by small fractures in her spine, also known as vertebral compression fractures (VCFs).

"The pain was so bad, I couldn't do anything," Elizabeth said. "I couldn't get out of bed. It was awful."

Increased risks for VCFs

Elizabeth isn't the only one at risk for spinal fractures. A recent report issued by the Surgeon General noted that by 2020, one in two Americans over age 50 will be at risk for fractures from osteoporosis or low bone mass. The National Osteoporosis Foundation estimates that 700,000 vertebral compression fractures—more than in the hip and wrist combined—occur annually due to osteoporosis in the U.S. Alarming, an estimated two-thirds of all spinal fractures go undiagnosed or untreated due to the absence of symptoms or difficulty determining the cause of symptoms, leading some to call osteoporosis a "silent disease."

Traditional treatments for patients with spinal fractures include bed rest, medication and back bracing. While these therapies may help to decrease a patient's pain over time, they do not treat the deformity related to

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osteoporotic fractures. If left untreated, one fracture can lead to others, which may create a curvature of the spine called "kyphosis," sometimes referred to as a "dowager's hump." Over time, this curvature becomes more pronounced, painful and debilitating.

There's hope

Once diagnosed with a spinal fracture, Elizabeth asked her physician about a procedure called Balloon Kyphoplasty that she learned about from a presentation at her senior center. Balloon Kyphoplasty is a minimally invasive procedure designed to repair spinal fractures. It can be performed under local or general anesthesia and typically takes less than one hour to treat each fracture. In some cases, it may require an overnight hospital stay. More than 100,000 patients have been treated with Balloon Kyphoplasty, which in most cases is covered by Medicare and other insurances.

Balloon Kyphoplasty can restore vertebral body height, significantly reduce back pain and increase mobility, often shortly after the procedure. In addition to reducing pain, patients experience an increased ability to return to simple, everyday activities such as

walking, reaching, bending and lifting. Patients also report improved and sustained mental health, vitality, social function and emotional health.

"My pain was relieved almost immediately after the procedure," said Elizabeth. "After 45 minutes, I could stand up straight and walk out of the hospital pain-free."

Elizabeth's doctor realized how important this treatment option was for her.

"Elizabeth's osteoporosis caused small fractures in her spine, making her a prime candidate for Balloon Kyphoplasty," said Dr. Michael Russell, an orthopedic surgeon in Tyler, Texas. "With proper diagnosis and treatment, spinal fracture sufferers can significantly improve their ability to perform normal activities of daily living and enjoy an overall improvement in their quality of life."

"I feel absolutely wonderful," Elizabeth said.

It is important to determine the underlying cause of back pain. Whereas there are many causes of back pain, a complete physical exam, X rays and MRI will help determine whether or not a spinal fracture is present. Although the complication rate with Balloon Kyphoplasty has been demonstrated to be low, as with most surgical procedures, there are associated risks, including serious complications. Be sure to consult a doctor for a discussion of the risks.

For more information about Balloon Kyphoplasty or to locate a physician near you, please visit www.kyphon.com.