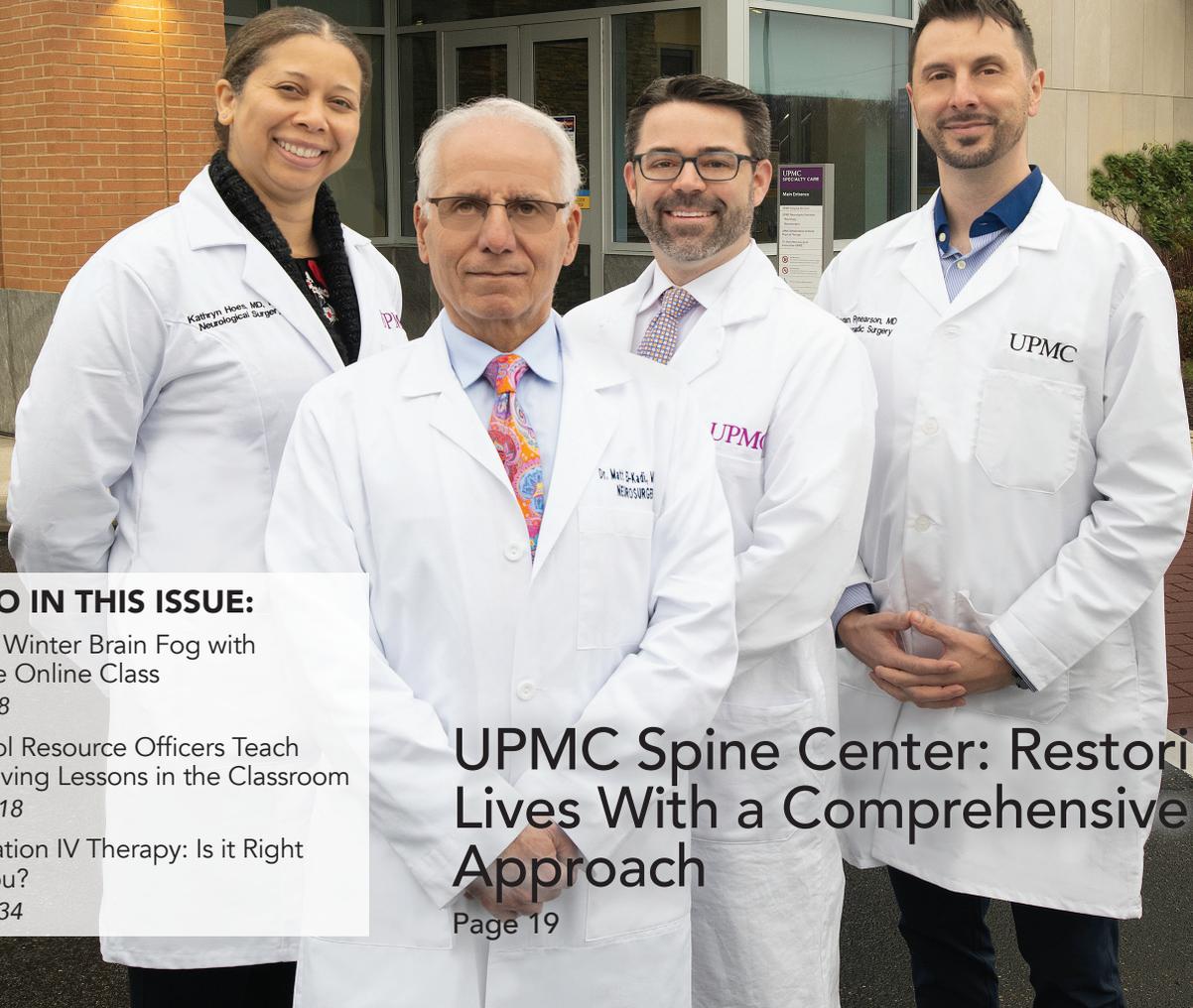




YOUR PREMIER REGIONAL MAGAZINE



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UPMC Spine Center: Restoring Lives With a Comprehensive Approach

UPMC's innovative spine program is a regional leader in the treatment of complex back and neck problems. The UPMC Spine Center — located at UPMC Specialty Care in Wexford — brings together experts from multiple specialties to provide comprehensive diagnostic and outpatient care at one convenient location.



UPMC neurosurgeons Robert Bailey, MD, and Kathryn Hoes, MD

Most of us experience temporary neck or back pain from time to time. It's normal to feel sore or stiff after hours of yard work or even sitting at a desk. But if your symptoms are constant or severe, it may be time to see a specialist. That's especially true if you also have numbness, tingling, weakness, or pain that radiates down your arms or legs.

COMPREHENSIVE, CONVENIENT CARE

Since opening in 2015, the UPMC Spine Center has drawn a wide range of specialists together under

one roof to diagnose and treat patients. This comprehensive team of experts includes:

- Neurosurgeons
- Neurologists
- Orthopaedic spine surgeons
- Physiatrists
- Physical therapists
- Pain management specialists
- Diagnostic imaging specialists

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"Patients have access to the resources they need here in one location for diagnosis, treatment, and recovery," says **Matt El-Kadi, MD, PhD**, chief of neurosurgery at UPMC Passavant and director of the UPMC Spine Center.

NEW SURGEONS BRING EXPANDED CAPABILITIES

The recent addition of two surgeons has expanded the capabilities of UPMC Passavant and the Spine Center.

"We are pleased to welcome these talented surgeons," says Dr. El-Kadi. "We are offering a broad spectrum of brain and spine surgery at UPMC Passavant."

Kathryn Hoes, MD, is a fellowship-trained neurosurgeon specializing in complex spine disorders. In addition to advanced training in spine surgery, she has special training in peripheral nerve and brain surgery. She brings significant experience in the use of innovative technology in surgery. **Bryan Rynearson, MD**, is an orthopaedic surgeon who is fellowship-trained in complex spine surgery. He has a special interest in scoliosis and other spinal deformities.

Both surgeons say that they were drawn to UPMC because of the unique multidisciplinary approach of the Spine Center.

"It really is a one-stop shop for patients with neurological issues, whether they need surgery or not," says Dr. Rynearson. "It's a bonus for us as doctors, too. Our colleagues are literally down the hall so we can discuss cases in real time. That's the value of a place like the Spine Center: Everyone is invested in finding the best possible solutions for patients."

"The resources available here are phenomenal," agrees Dr. Hoes. "I believe in multispecialty coordinated care. Patients benefit when we work together quickly and efficiently to provide truly specialized care."

Having so many specialists in one location is important for patients needing to see more than one expert, adds **Robert Bailey, MD**, a neurosurgeon at the Spine Center. Appointments with different specialists can be scheduled in advance for the same day, so patients don't have to

make multiple trips for the same issue. Ample parking and easy access also make the location appealing for patients.

"Patients can have their imaging done right there before or after their appointment. It allows us to make real-time decisions," says Dr. Bailey. "We work closely together as a team. We can immediately consult with other specialists on the best treatment approach."



From left to right: UPMC Spine Center experts Bryan Rynearson, MD, Matt El-Kadi, MD, PhD, Robert Bailey, MD, and Kathryn Hoes, MD.



The UPMC Spine Center — located at UPMC Specialty Care in Wexford — brings together experts from multiple specialties to provide comprehensive diagnostic and outpatient care at one convenient location.

A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

Most patients seeking relief of back and neck pain at the Spine Center don't require surgery. The majority can be treated with physical therapy, anti-inflammatory medicine, and injections. "Our approach is very conservative," says Dr. Ryneerson.

If surgery is needed, the Spine Center's neurosurgeons and orthopaedic spine surgeon are experts in minimally invasive and complex surgical procedures. "We start with the least invasive approach to relieve pain, restore function, and improve mobility," says Dr. El-Kadi.

Technology and collaboration with surgeons from other disciplines, such as thoracic and vascular, enhances access to numerous areas of the spine. They take a multidisciplinary approach to treating patients with spine tumors, working closely with radiation oncologists at UPMC Hillman Cancer Center at UPMC Passavant.

ADVANCED OPERATING SUITES

All spine surgeries are performed at the UPMC Passavant-McCandless Patient Pavilion, which has a dedicated spine care unit.

Three state-of-the-art operating rooms are used exclusively for spinal surgery. Each is equipped with the latest technology. This includes specialized software used during surgery to create a 3D model of the spine in seconds for a real-time view of the patient's anatomy. The pavilion also features spacious private rooms for patients requiring an overnight stay.

A new navigation system with robotic technology is coming to UPMC Passavant in 2023. It will help surgeons to place surgical instruments in the spine even more precisely. Using CT scans taken before surgery to create a map of the patient's body, the system guides the placement of screws. "We're all very excited about this," says Dr. Hoes. "It allows for more procedures to be done in a less invasive way.

"Innovations offer great opportunities, but it takes a skilled surgeon to use it effectively. We are thrilled to offer that expertise to patients here at UPMC Passavant," adds Dr. Hoes.

To schedule an appointment at the UPMC Spine Center, call 724-720-4599.

All the Right Moves

Finding Relief at the UPMC Spine Center

In the world of competitive ballroom dancing, injuries are not uncommon. But for Terry Sweeney, who has been in the industry for 35 years as a competitor, instructor, coach, and judge, it was the decades of hard work and dancing that took a toll on his body.

"I wore out the discs in my back," says Terry, who lives in Shaler Township and co-owns a dance studio in Etna with his wife, Rozana. While preparing for a competition in Pittsburgh some years ago, he lifted a heavy speaker, turned, and immediately knew he had hurt his back.

The injury turned out to be a herniated disc in his lower back. "I was in extreme pain," says Terry. "But it was successfully treated with muscle relaxers, physical therapy, and patience."

Years later, he began experiencing back pain again, plus pain and numbness in his legs. So, Terry returned to Dr. El-Kadi, the same neurosurgeon who treated him previously.

"I knew where to go. I love Dr. El-Kadi and his staff," says Terry, 58. "I trusted him. And I knew they'd take care of me."

PUZZLING SYMPTOMS

Terry was certain he injured his back again. "I had extreme sciatica pain from my lower back all the way to my ankle in my right leg. My left leg felt numb," says Terry. "For someone who teaches ballroom dancing for a living, it wasn't easy."

As a coach, as well as a certified adjudicator, Terry travels frequently throughout North America. Competitions can be grueling, lasting for days from 8 a.m. until midnight. As his symptoms worsened, he began using a cane to walk and even a wheelchair to get around airports. "It got to the point where I couldn't travel anymore," says Terry.

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Although his symptoms initially indicated a problem in Terry's lower back, Dr. El-Kadi wasn't so sure. When he watched Terry walk, he detected a spastic gait plus weakness in his entire left leg — not just in one muscle group. That, along with the lower back pain, was "mystifying," says Dr. El-Kadi.

"I knew the problem wasn't coming from his back. So, I started looking somewhere else."

FINDING THE ANSWER

After a series of MRIs, CT scans, bloodwork, and other tests, Dr. El-Kadi was certain he knew what was causing Terry's pain and numbness. But because of the unusual presentation of symptoms — and the multidisciplinary focus of the Spine Center — he consulted with other specialists, including another neurosurgeon and a neurologist, to confirm his diagnosis.

Terry praised Dr. El-Kadi and his colleagues for their thoroughness. "They eliminated everything until they knew exactly what it was," he says. "And they nailed it!"

Tests confirmed that Terry's problem was in his neck — not his back. He had severe cervical stenosis with a herniated disc and bone spur compressing his spinal cord. "I would have expected neck pain along with pain and weakness in his arms, but Terry didn't have that," says Dr. El-Kadi. "That made the diagnosis challenging."

In August 2022 at UPMC Passavant–McCandless, Dr. El-Kadi performed a three-level anterior cervical discectomy and fusion to clear out bone fragments and remove the damaged discs. The next day when he started inpatient physical therapy, Terry immediately noticed a difference.

"As soon as I stood up, I knew for sure the surgery was a success," says Terry. "The sciatic pain was gone, and the lower back pain was gone. My wife was standing there next to me crying tears of joy."

A GRATEFUL PATIENT

Terry was discharged two days after his surgery. Although he was glad to return home, Terry describes the care he received at UPMC Passavant as "exquisite."

"Everyone at UPMC Passavant was phenomenal — from the food service to housekeeping to the nurses and other health care workers," says Terry. "They were there for everything I needed. I was as comfortable as I could be in that situation."

He still has lingering numbness in one leg, but that should continue to improve. Meanwhile, Terry says he's grateful to be pain-free with a 70% improvement in mobility — improvements that have allowed him to continue teaching and traveling again to competitions.

"I love my job — every aspect," says Terry. "I'm so glad to be able to continue doing what I love."

Although the extensive testing he underwent showed other discs with significant degeneration, Terry has not yet experienced any symptoms.

"If I have another problem, I know where to go," says Terry. "Dr. El-Kadi — and his staff and colleagues at the UPMC Spine Center — are the best." ■



Top: Shaler resident and dance studio owner Terry Sweeney suffered from lower back pain. He found relief from experts at the UPMC Spine Center and UPMC Passavant.

Bottom: Terry and wife Rozana performing in a ballroom dancing competition in 2000.