

New Knees, A Gift For A Woman From A World Away

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Residents of the mostly Muslim, post-Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan don't have a particularly rosy picture of Americans. But at least for some, that may be about to change.

Dinara Asadullayeve, a 75-year-old resident of the Uzbekistani capital of Tashkent, underwent successful double knee-replacement at Crittenton Hospital in Rochester December 15, 2005. Costs for the entire process, including her hospital stay, surgery and physical therapy, were donated.

Since mid-October, Asadullayeve has been staying at the Bloomfield Hills home of her daughter, Dildora Damisch, who has lived in the United States for seven years. She said her mother had been in pain for five years, which had recently worsened. Since life in Tashkent required a lot of walking, even to the grocery store, it was a pain she couldn't escape.

Free, universal health care is provided in Uzbekistan. But medicine, trained professionals and equipment are in short supply in the country of 23 million, even in the capital city. The family connected with Rochester Hills knee surgeon Jeffrey DeClaire through Kathleen Goch, a friend of Damisch's who had the same minimally invasive knee surgery.

"When I watched my friend Kathleen, she couldn't walk or even stand for 10 minutes," Damisch said. A day after her surgery, she was up and walking. "She's running, going dancing," Damisch said. "Your life really changed after surgery."

The minimally invasive procedure, which has been around for less than two years, allows for a much smaller incision than conventional knee-replacement surgery. Because of the development of new instruments, there is considerably less surgical trauma and a much quicker recovery, DeClaire said.



Dr. Jeffrey DeClaire performing knee replacement surgery

"Not everybody is a candidate but I would say 80 percent of patients," DeClaire said. He's done approximately 250 of the procedures. "Some of our patients go back to work within two weeks of surgery, which is a big improvement."

It was Goch who approached DeClaire about donating his services.

"This was a requirement to provide total care, start to finish," he said. That meant getting Crittenton Hospital and an anesthesiologist to donate their services, along with physical therapy services afterward.

In the end, DeClaire had no trouble getting it all donated, including the equipment needed for the surgery. Rochester Hills internist William Bowman provided pre-surgical screening for Asadullayeve, who has high blood pressure and diabetes.

"It's an opportunity to help somebody," DeClaire said. Damisch and her mother were shocked at the generosity. "It's amazing," Damisch said. "I called my mother and she couldn't believe it. A couple more years without the surgery and she might not have been able to walk. "My mom is very impressed with the whole staff here at the hospital; very kind, very nice. In Uzbekistan, medicine is free but they really don't take care of anybody."

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, "everything is destroyed, the health system, too, even the doctor, if he is good, they don't have the technique... (Here) they couldn't even read her EKG; it's (that) old."

"I want to tell to all the doctors...big thanks, there's nothing else I can tell," Asadullayeve, who speaks Uzbek and Russian, said through her daughter. "I wish that God Bless them for all the good things they are doing for me."