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HOW THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBINGS CHANGED MY LIFE AS A DOCTOR

By Dr. Kevin Ju

As a young and curious child, I was always trying to figure out how things worked. When I was growing up in Houston, my parents, a computer programmer mom and a chemical engineer dad, encouraged my curiosity about how things worked.

I spent a lot of time taking things, such as microwave ovens and lamps, apart and then putting them back together. In spite of having no doctors in my family, I was interested in biology and the human body at a very early age. I was fortunate

enough to do some research at Baylor Hospital when I was in high school, and I was allowed to shadow a surgeon early on. This spurred my interest in medicine.

I majored in biology at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California and wrote an honors thesis in neurobiology as an undergraduate. I later attended medical school at Harvard and then stayed in Boston for my residency training.

My time in Boston was marked by a tragic event that forever changed the way I perceive the world around me.

The Boston Marathon Bombing

On the morning of April 15th, 2013, both visitors and Bostonians alike were excited about participating in and watching the 117th Annual Boston Marathon. No one could guess the extent of the tragedy that was to follow.

For me, it was another day of residency training at Boston Children's Hospital. I was on call in the emergency room. Three years later, I still remember how difficult this experience was and how it made me a better doctor.

The hardest thing any doctor has to do is triage emergency patients in a trauma setting. You are forced to make difficult decisions. When the Boston Marathon bombing occurred, this was the most difficult time I ever experienced.

“WE HAD TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT WHICH SON OR DAUGHTER WE WERE GOING TO GET INTO THE OR FIRST, AND WHICH PATIENTS MIGHT BE ABLE TO WAIT ANOTHER 30 MINUTES.”

We had many children coming to our emergency room who had been badly injured by the bombs, but there was a limited number of surgeons and operating rooms available to treat them. We had to make decisions about which son or daughter we were going to get into the OR first, and which patients might be able to wait another 30 minutes. Those decisions are never easy, but sometimes you have to make them.

Fortunately, we were able to get all of the patients in the operating room treated appropriately and properly. However, going through it was extremely stressful. This traumatic experience changed me. I realized the fragility of human life, and how important it is for a surgeon to remain clear-headed and focused on the job at hand, regardless of the chaos that might be swirling about.

The Texas Back Institute became my clear next step. We treat any spinal condition, no matter how big or small the problem. Besides excelling clinically, the Texas Back Institute has an impressive

reputation for research and education. I got involved in basic scientific research early on, and I started doing medical research and teaching when I was at Harvard Medical School. Joining the Texas Back Institute not only allows me to continue to advance in the field of spine surgery with the Texas Back Institute Foundation, but their fellowship program allows me to train the next generation of spine surgeons. I have been fortunate to have had many excellent teachers and through this fellowship program, I can pass this knowledge along to the next generation.

A Conservative Medical Philosophy

My philosophy is to closely listen to my patients to understand how their symptoms are impacting their lives. Not everyone with the same symptoms should get the same treatment. It should be individualized to each patient based on their goals.

I am also not afraid to spend the time to explain the diagnosis and the process for treatment. I want to make sure they get the answers to all of their questions. I believe that if patients understand the treatment and agree that this is the best approach, better outcomes result.

Finally, I am a conservative surgeon. I am a firm believer in trying all other modalities, whether it's highly targeted physical therapy or medications, before prescribing surgery. Surgery should be a last resort, but if it is necessary, my approach would be to craft the surgery to be minimally invasive with the least disruption possible for the patient.

For more information visit www.texasback.com or call 1.800.247.2225.



About Dr. Kevin Ju: Dr. Ju's academic career includes a bachelor's of science degree from Stanford University, where he graduated

with University Distinction as well as Honors in Neurobiology, and he received the J.E. Wallace Sterling Award for Scholastic Achievement. This was followed by high honors in all coursework and rotations at Harvard Medical School, where he earned his medical degree in 2010. He completed his residency training at the Harvard Combined Orthopedic Residency Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, and then he received additional fellowship training in spine surgery with the internationally recognized surgeons at the Emory University Spine Center.

Dr. Ju has trained with both orthopedic surgeons and neurosurgeons, and he specializes in conditions of the neck and back, such as cervical, thoracic and lumbar spine issues. He is a member of many professional organizations dedicated to the promotion and maintenance of high medical standards and continuing education, including the North American Spine Society, the international AOSpine society and the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. Dr. Ju has authored numerous peer-reviewed publications and instructional book chapters in the field of spine surgery, and he has presented at more than a dozen national and international spine conferences.

Dr. Ju enjoys outdoor activities in his spare time including scuba diving, skiing, sailing and archery. Dr. Ju also enjoys technology, gadgets and is conversational in Mandarin Chinese.