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From the Dallas Business Journal:

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How artificial disc replacement is boosting this spinal hospital's bottom line

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The Texas Back Institute in Plano was one of the first hospitals in the United States to conduct artificial disc replacement surgery, and since 2000, its doctors have performed more than 2,500 of those procedures, making the institute one of the largest disc replacement centers in the country.

The spine surgeons at the Back Institute use activL artificial discs, which consist of two endplates made of a mix of cobalt-chromium metal alloy with a titanium coating and a plastic polyethylene insert between the two endplates. The result is better mobility for patients, Dr. Jack Zigler, an orthopedic spine surgeon at the institute and co-director of the Center for Disc Replacement, told me in an interview.

Before activL, there was only one other disc replacement device on the

market. The lack of market competition combined with the fact that some insurance companies do not cover the procedure, made it difficult to control costs for patients, Zigler said.

Surgeons found that patients were traveling to Europe to receive this surgery because of the lack of viable options in the United States, Zigler said. If there are complications after the patient returns to the country, however, it is difficult to get a U.S. surgeon to do repair work, he said.

Today, Texas Back Institute offers multiple disc replacement options and also has developed a patient pay model which provides a discount to patients who can't secure insurance coverage for the procedure.

Here, Zigler discusses how disc replacement surgery is contributing to the Back Institute's caseload.

How many patients do you see and how many operations do you perform at the Texas Back Institute in Plano? It's the largest freestanding clinic in the U.S. devoted just to spine care. We see about 35,000 patients a year and do about 3,500 surgeries (of all types) a year.

How much does disc replacement surgery cost at the Texas Back Institute compared to having the procedure done in Europe? For a single-level lumbar disc replacement — for everything, the provider, hospital — it's about \$35,000 here, and for Europe, with the medical tourism (approach),



Dr. Jack Zigler, orthopedic spine surgeon and co-director of the Center for Disc Replacement at the Texas Back Institute in Plano.

it's closer to \$40,000 to \$80,000 for the same procedure.

How many disc replacement surgeries has Texas Back Institute done?

Since 2000, we've implanted about 2,500 patients with about 3,000 artificial discs.

What's fueling demand for disc replacement surgery? There is a lot more information on the Internet. We get very educated people who come in and they are asking some very detailed questions because they're shopping around. They've got skin in the game because they're paying for part of it.

Where are your patients coming from? More than half of our patients come from outside of Texas. We get some international patients, and many from surrounding states.

Bill Hethcock

Staff Writer

Dallas Business Journal

