



# Health Matters

## Spine Surgery Saves Retiree's Life

*MCP Brain and Spine Hospital Offers Expertise When Advanced Treatment Is Needed*

"Take me to Plano" has a special meaning for Ron Smetana of Mt. Pleasant. The 65-year-old credits his transfer to The Medical Center of Plano with saving his life.

Smetana had rarely been sick throughout his life. He had recently retired and was looking forward to doing a major renovation project in his yard when he started having some unusual symptoms.

### NO CLEAR DIAGNOSIS

"In August of 2014, I began falling down frequently and started having hallucinations," Smetana says. "So I went to my local emergency room."

Initially, the doctors at his local hospital tested him for a heart condition, since he had had a transient ischemic attack (TIA) about six years before, but they couldn't find a problem. As the weeks went by, Smetana's condition worsened, and doctors could not find a cause for his symptoms.

Finally, after four weeks, a gravely ill Smetana was diagnosed with spinal meningitis. His case was deemed too serious for the local hospital, and he was rushed to The Medical Center of Plano, where he was seen by spine surgeon Rajesh Arakal, M.D.

Initially, Smetana's prognosis was not good. "My family was told I might not survive," recalls Smetana. "And if I did live, there was a good chance I would become a quadriplegic."

*Ron Smetana's case was deemed too serious for the local hospital, and he was rushed to The Medical Center of Plano.*

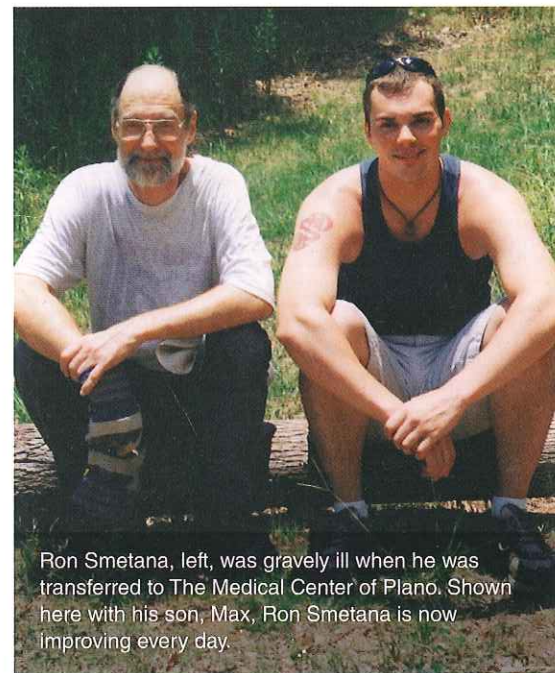
### BRAIN AND SPINE HOSPITAL CRUCIAL

Fortunately, Dr. Arakal was able to operate immediately. "By the time he got to us, he had a very serious infection that had destroyed his cervical spine," says Dr. Arakal of The Medical Center of Plano's advanced Brain and Spine Hospital. "First I performed surgery to remove as much of the infection as possible, and then I performed a second surgery a few days later to replace some of the lost bone in his neck with bone from his hip."

Not only did Smetana live, but with the help of physical therapy, he also has full use of his arms and legs and continues to improve every day. He can now walk again without a cane



**THE BRAIN & SPINE HOSPITAL**  
The Medical Center of Plano



Ron Smetana, left, was gravely ill when he was transferred to The Medical Center of Plano. Shown here with his son, Max, Ron Smetana is now improving every day.

and is hoping to eventually return to his landscaping project. "Dr. Arakal saved my life," says Smetana. "I call him my surgeon and my savior."

Turn to page 2 to find out about other advanced care at The Medical Center of Plano's Brain and Spine Hospital.

# Brain and Spine Hospital a Leader in Handling Complex Conditions



**Raj Arakal, M.D.**

Infections in the spine are a lot more common than many people realize. Unfortunately, when infections reach the spine, they can also be quite serious.

“Once it progresses, the infection can start to destroy the spinal cord and cause a curvature in the spine or other spinal deformities,” says Rajesh Arakal, M.D., a spine surgeon at The Medical Center of Plano. “When infections reach that stage, we not only need to clear the infection, but also perform surgery to reconstruct the spine.”

The team at The Medical Center of Plano’s Brain and Spine Hospital is well equipped to handle these severe cases and an array of other complex

conditions. With one of the largest neuroscience units in the country, patients benefit from the most advanced lifesaving technology and leading-edge therapies.

“We often receive patients from other hospitals that can’t handle these serious infections once surgery is required,” says Dr. Arakal. “We have the expertise and the technology to treat these highly specialized cases.”

Treatment is tailored to the individual. Dr. Arakal notes that most spine infections don’t require surgery. “The key is early diagnosis and treatment with the proper course of antibiotics.”

## **EXPERTISE MATTERS**

Read more about the hospital’s advanced brain and spine treatments at [www.TheBrainandSpineHospital.com](http://www.TheBrainandSpineHospital.com).

## What You Need to Know About Headaches

Everyone gets a headache now and then. Knowing what to expect—and when to get medical care right away—can help ease your pain, according to Supriya Thiru, M.D., a neurologist on staff at The Medical Center of Plano.

### **TENSION HEADACHES**

“These headaches are usually caused by tight muscles in the shoulders, neck, scalp, or jaw brought on by anxiety, depression, or stress,” states Dr. Thiru. “Symptoms may include a dull ache on both sides or all around your head, or tightness in the jaw or neck. These headaches often strike in the middle of the day, begin slowly, and gradually get worse,” she adds.

### **MIGRAINE HEADACHES**

Among other things, migraines can be triggered by alcohol, chocolate, some cheeses, MSG, and too little caffeine or

sleep. Changing weather, bright sunshine, and hormonal shifts cause migraines in some people. Four out of five people who get them have a family history of migraines.

“Migraines cause severe, throbbing, pounding pain that often begins on one side of the head. Sufferers often experience sensitivity to light and noise, nausea, and vomiting,” says Dr. Thiru. Some 15 to 20 percent of migraine sufferers have an aura before the headache hits that may include seeing flashing lights or hallucinations.

### **WHEN TO WORRY**

“In rare cases, headaches can warn of a serious condition. If you experience a sudden, horrible headache, especially with nausea or vomiting, head straight to the emergency room,” advises Dr. Thiru. The worst headache of your life could actually be the first sign of a brain aneurysm. Symptoms this severe usually



mean a blood vessel has ruptured, causing bleeding in the brain. Also see a doctor right away if you:

- Have a headache following a blow to the head
- Lose consciousness or have convulsions
- Also experience pain in the eye or ear, a stiff neck, fever, or confusion

Let your physician know if you develop sudden, severe headaches as well.