



MedStar Health

MEDSTAR GEORGETOWN
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

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MedStar Georgetown MD



Gary is back to doing what he loves, casting lines with confidence after spinal surgery.

Photo courtesy of Gary Monroe

Innovative awake spinal surgery delivers a fast, pain-free recovery.

By Emily Marrs

Gary Monroe has enjoyed good health most of his life. Even after retiring, he stayed active, playing golf and walking 2 to 3 miles daily. When he started experiencing pain in his left hip, he wasn't concerned at first, but the pain progressed. "I started to feel the pain not only in my hip but down my thigh, and then a tingling in my foot. I knew something wasn't

continued on page 7

Leading-edge cancer care helped Shannon return to her pediatric patients.

By Jennifer Young

When Shannon Swickard found out she had invasive breast cancer, she knew her active lifestyle was about to change. Just twenty-nine years old and a dedicated pediatric physician assistant, Shannon has always enjoyed running, traveling, and working at a local hospital.

"Being a healthcare provider at the time of my diagnosis was a blessing and a curse," she says. "I knew what the next steps were going to be, and I understood a lot of the medical language that coincides with that diagnosis. But I had seen the effects

of cancer before, and I also understood all of the things that could go wrong."

A few months before her diagnosis, Shannon discovered a lump in her right breast and went to see her primary care physician, who ordered tests and imaging. She had a biopsy shortly after.

"When I saw the results come in on the online portal, I reviewed them immediately," she says. "That's when I saw that it was breast cancer."

continued on page 6



Stronger every day after expert cancer care, Shannon has returned to doing some of her favorite things, like cycling and caring for her young patients. Photo by Hilary Schwab

Inside.

2 The world's first all-plastic ankle replacement is helping Meghan, who is allergic to metal, return to her active life.

3 A lasting legacy: How the Clark Foundation transformed care for families across D.C.

4 Stay steady this season: Preventing falls during outdoor activities.

5 One kidney donor saves two lives with voucher donation.

The world's first all-plastic ankle replacement is helping Meghan, who is allergic to metal, return to her active life.

By Susan Walker

Even though she was living with arthritis in both ankles and knees, Montgomery County, Maryland, resident Meghan Lembesis led a busy, active life that included horseback riding, hikes in the nearby woods, yoga classes, and swimming at the town lake.

"In general, I was able to manage the pain," she says. But one morning as she got out of bed, she took two steps and fell to the floor because of unbearable pain in her right ankle, the result of an injury to her Achilles tendon. That injury exacerbated the existing pain in her right ankle, leaving her reliant on a cane and unable to walk on any uneven surface, like the grass in her pasture or the sand at the town beach.

"When I saw...that [Dr. Cooper] had worked with every ankle replacement system in existence, I had hope he could help me."

— Meghan Lembesis

"Suddenly, I couldn't do any of the things I enjoyed, like walking with friends or even working in the garden," Meghan adds.

Unwilling to let pain limit her, Meghan made an appointment with her orthopaedist, who recommended a colleague specializing in conditions that affect the foot and ankle. But there was a complicating factor. Meghan has always been allergic to nickel and was potentially allergic to other metals. That meant standard ankle replacement with a metal joint was out of the question.

While researching orthopaedists online, Meghan discovered Paul Cooper, MD, a foot and ankle orthopaedic specialist, and the director of the Foot and Ankle Center at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. Meghan dug further into his background and was encouraged by what she found.



After a successful ankle replacement, Meghan enjoys an active life once again—starting with playtime with her beloved dog. Photo by Hilary Schwab

"When I saw on his MedStar Georgetown physician's page that he had worked with every ankle replacement system in existence, I had hope he could help me," says Meghan.

Unlike other orthopaedists Meghan had consulted, Dr. Cooper was not fazed by her metal allergy. In fact, he was able to offer her a groundbreaking option—a metal-free joint made of a plastic called polyetherketoneketone (PEKK).

"PEKK implants have been used for more than 10 years to replace skull bone in neurosurgery, and in the past few years, the field has expanded to include orthopaedic

implants to replace bone removed during cancer surgery," explains Dr. Cooper. "I had been working with a supplier to use this material to create replacement joints and Meghan was the perfect candidate for the first 3D-printed, all-plastic ankle."

Beyond being a solution to her metal allergy, the PEKK ankle also offered a number of other advantages, including the ability to customize the joint for each patient, the flexibility to trim and adjust it in the operating room during surgery to achieve a precise fit, and the fact that an all-plastic joint is as strong as a metal one but four to seven times lighter, depending on which joint is being replaced, so it feels better for the patient.

After a successful surgery performed by Dr. Cooper, Meghan became the first person in the world to receive an all-plastic replacement ankle and was able to go home the same day.

"For years, Meghan was living with the pain of bone-on-bone arthritis," says Dr. Cooper. "Four months after her surgery, she was doing well, continuing to recover and easing back into the activities she enjoys. Because MedStar Georgetown is an academic medical center, we're able to offer our patients cutting-edge treatment options that are carefully studied and well vetted, something they can't find at other centers."

Meghan is grateful to be moving towards a return to her active life. "With Dr. Cooper, I felt seen, heard, and understood," she says. "I knew I was in extraordinarily skilled hands."

MedStar Georgetown is part of the MedStar Orthopaedic Institute, with 47 orthopaedic surgery specialists at 20 locations throughout Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Visit **MedStarOrthopaedicInstitute.org** for more information.

Visit **MedStarHealth.org/MGUOrtho**, or to make an appointment with one of our orthopaedic specialists, call **202-444-8766**.

A lasting legacy: How the Clark Foundation transformed care for families across D.C.

By Emily Marrs and Justine Hudock

Every year, thousands of families turn to MedStar Health for expert maternal care, from prenatal support to postpartum recovery. When Moesha Rose delivered her third child, she experienced that care firsthand, surrounded by a dedicated team of nurses and midwives who ensured she felt safe, supported, and empowered.

"I was truly amazed by everyone I worked with," Moesha recalls. "They all made me feel like I wasn't just a patient, but that I was part of the team."

Thanks to the expert care made possible through the A. James & Alice B. Clark Foundation's support, Moesha benefited from an innovative model designed to address maternal health disparities. Through Safe Babies Safe Moms, she received comprehensive support services that improved her health outcomes before, during, and after pregnancy.

From 2020 to 2025, Safe Babies Safe Moms has served more than 50,000 patients. Data shows that participating mothers experience significantly lower rates of preterm birth and low birth weight compared to regional and national averages.

Through MedStar Health's Safe Babies Safe Moms initiative, she was connected to nurses, social workers, nurse navigators, and community-based partners who guided her through prenatal care, labor, delivery, and the postpartum process, providing personalized care, behavioral health screenings, legal assistance, and access to essential resources like transportation and home visits.

Creating new opportunities for D.C. residents to thrive is at the heart of the Clark Foundation's mission, one that has transformed healthcare and supported nonprofit and community



Loral Patchen, CNM, PhD, cares for a Safe Babies Safe Moms patient with the warmth and expertise that defines both the Clark Foundation's and MedStar Health's commitment to families. Photo by MedStar Health

organizations in Washington, D.C., through philanthropic partnerships. From 2020 to 2025, Safe Babies Safe Moms has served more than 50,000 patients. Data shows that participating mothers experience significantly lower rates of preterm birth and low birth weight compared to regional and national averages.

Over the years, the foundation has partnered with MedStar Georgetown, MedStar Washington Hospital Center, and the MedStar Health Research Institute through the Safe Babies Safe Moms initiative to address the maternal and infant mortality crisis in D.C. and the U.S.

As the foundation closes its doors in 2025, MedStar Health is reflecting on the incredible legacy of generosity that has fueled initiatives like Safe Babies Safe Moms.

"The Clark Foundation's vision has enabled us to create a model of care that not only saves lives but also transforms them," says Angela Thomas, DrPH, MPH, MBA, vice president, Healthcare Delivery Research, MedStar Health Research Institute.

"Safe Babies Safe Moms is setting a new standard for maternal care and its

impact has been recognized in the *New England Journal of Medicine Catalyst* for its innovative, multi-generational model that measurably improves pregnancy and postpartum outcomes, particularly in reducing racial disparities."

Since its formal establishment in 2016, following Mr. Clark's passing, the foundation has committed an extraordinary \$383 million to initiatives across the D.C. community, with a significant focus on supporting MedStar Health's vision for holistic, community-based care.

A collaborative vision for the future

Through partnerships across Women's and Infant Services, Community Pediatrics, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Women's Mental Health Program, and Family Medicine at MedStar Health, the foundation's support has helped build a system of care that is not only comprehensive but deeply connected to the needs of the community.

"None of this would have been possible without the transformative philanthropic support from the A. James & Alice B. Clark Foundation," says Stephen Evans, MD, executive vice president, Medical Affairs and chief medical officer, MedStar Health. "Their partnership has allowed us to not only address medical needs but also the social and economic barriers that impact the health of our patients."

The stories of countless patients whose lives were changed thanks to Safe Babies Safe Moms stand as a testament to the Clark family's enduring commitment to giving back—a legacy shaped by A. James Clark's vision and carried forward by his daughter, Courtney Clark Pastrick. Their generosity has provided life-changing care and a sustainable model that will continue to uplift families in the D.C. region, ensuring that Safe Babies Safe Moms remains a beacon of hope for years to come.

To learn more about how your support can make a significant difference, visit [MedStarHealth.org/Support](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Support) or call **202-444-0721**.

Stay steady this season: Preventing falls during outdoor activities.

By Kerri Layman, MD, Chief, Emergency Medicine, MedStar Georgetown University Hospital

Spring is here, and more people are getting active: jogging, hiking, and playing on outdoor courts and playgrounds. But spring's damp conditions, like wet grass, uneven trails, and puddle-covered sidewalks, can all contribute to an increased risk of slips and falls.

Falls are a leading cause of injury at this time of year, especially among older adults and those with mobility concerns. By understanding what contributes to falls, taking a few precautions, and knowing how to respond effectively to minimize injury if you do begin to fall, you can stay safe all season long.

What causes falls?

We all know the risks of a slick walking path: one wrong step on damp pavement or a muddy trail can lead to a painful tumble and common but potentially serious injuries. Slips often happen in an instant, as feet slide forward or sideways, causing instinctive reactions like reaching out to break the fall—resulting in wrist and arm injuries—or landing awkwardly on the hip or back. A sudden loss of balance can also lead to more serious head injuries if there's no time to brace for impact.

These conditions aren't limited to hiking paths or sidewalks. Dew-covered playground equipment, puddles on basketball courts, and wet floors inside entryways can all increase the risk of a fall—especially in high-traffic areas where distractions abound. Wet shoes can make indoor floors unexpectedly slippery, often leading to sprains, bruises, or more serious injuries.

If walking downhill, keep your knees slightly bent and your weight centered to maintain balance.

How to stay safe this season

Taking a few simple precautions can help you move through the season with confidence:

- **Step cautiously.** Walk slowly and take shorter steps to improve stability. If walking downhill, keep your knees slightly bent and your weight centered to maintain balance.

- **Choose the right footwear.**

Shoes with good traction and non-slip soles can help prevent slips and falls.

- **Use handrails when available.**

Whether on stairs, ramps, or getting in and out of vehicles, having an extra point of contact provides much-needed stability and can prevent a fall if you start to slip.

- **Stay aware of your surroundings.**

Scan ahead for potential hazards, like uneven ground, puddles, or wet floors in stores and offices. Avoid distractions, like texting or carrying items that block your view of the path ahead.

If you do start to slip, try to stay calm and bend your knees to lower your center of gravity. Aim to land on your side to distribute the impact and protect your wrists by keeping your arms bent and close to your body, rather than instinctively reaching out. If possible, roll with the fall to minimize injury.

If you rely on a walker or cane, ensure it has rubber tips or non-slip grips to provide better traction on wet surfaces. And, as always, it's important to seek medical attention if you do experience a fall: injuries can sometimes be more serious than they appear. For less severe injuries—like sprains, bruises, or minor fractures—Urgent Care at MedStar Health offers convenient walk-in care close to home, without a trip to the Emergency Department.

By staying mindful of potential hazards and taking a few simple precautions, you can keep seasonal challenges from slowing you down. A little extra care and preparation can help you stay safe and steady all season long.



Kerri Layman, MD



Good footwear and a little extra awareness go a long way in keeping walks safe and steady.

One kidney donor saves two lives with voucher donation.

By Susan Walker



Lily sitting in the giant green chair on the lawn at Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

Photo by C. King Media

Lily (her name has been changed to protect her privacy) had always planned to be an organ donor, checking the box on her driver's license application for donation in the event of her death.

But when she learned that living donation can lead to amazing results for someone in need of a kidney and that each year more than 6,000 people in the U.S. donate a kidney, she decided to explore living donation. The spouse of one of her coworkers had been a living kidney donor, which gave her some encouraging insight into the process and the surgery.

"There are more than 100,000 people in the U.S. waiting for a kidney transplant," she says. "I wanted to help one of them if I could."

Lily got the ball rolling using the MedStar Georgetown University Hospital online evaluation form, which she says was a quick and easy process. After getting lab work and other predonation testing completed, her donation surgery was scheduled.

Lily was donating her kidney to a stranger, a process called non-directed donation. As part of the donation process, one option was to receive a voucher that could be used if a family member needed a kidney transplant in future. Lily didn't expect that outcome,

and was thrilled to learn she could donate her voucher to a child on the transplant waiting list. It's one of the many ways we can work together to save lives and support families in need.

"If someone doesn't feel strongly about naming family members as voucher recipients, they can designate themselves as a pediatric voucher donor," explains Jennifer Verbesey, MD, director of Living Donor and Pediatric Kidney Transplantation with MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute and Children's National Medical Center.

"Through the pediatric voucher program, donors, like Lily, can provide lifesaving transplants for two people."

– Jennifer Verbesey, MD

"Donors are paired with an anonymous pediatric patient listed at one of these two hospitals through the National Kidney Registry. We have a list of pediatric recipients who would benefit greatly from a living donor transplant. We were able to enter Lily into the National Kidney Registry with a pediatric recipient who then got an offer for a living kidney donor transplant. So, Lily did an amazing thing!"

Dr. Verbesey performed Lily's donation surgery, which was successful, and her kidney was sent to a recipient in another state. As part of the kidney donation, a pediatric patient received a voucher for a transplant when they were ready for the surgery, so Lily was able to provide lifesaving transplants for two people that day. She was discharged from the hospital the next day, feeling good. "I had a fantastic experience at MedStar Georgetown. The staff were very

supportive and Dr. Verbesey was wonderful. I had essentially no pain and was walking the next day. It was a rapid recovery and I'm living my life with no limitations or concerns," she says. "The donation was very meaningful to me," she adds. "A formative experience. And, I'm grateful to Dr. Verbesey and her team for making it possible."

"Donors like Lily are able to transform lives," says Dr. Verbesey. "Living donor kidneys tend to work faster and last longer and are, by far, a better option for pediatric patients if possible. Our goal is to do as many living donor transplants as possible in the pediatric population. And when people choose to become pediatric voucher donors like Lily, they can make this happen."

Give the gift of life. Be a living kidney donor. Visit **MedStar Health.org/LivingDonorKidney** to learn more about living donation or to fill out an evaluation form. Or, call **202-444-3714**.



Meet Jennifer Verbesey, MD



Visit **MedStarHealth.org/VerbeseyAAD** to learn more about Dr. Verbesey.

Leading-edge cancer care helped Shannon return to her pediatric patients.

continued from page 1



Back in the swing of things, Shannon powers through recovery with the same energy she brings to everything—including cuddle sessions with her cat.

Photo by Hilary Schwab

After receiving the news, Shannon first called her mother. Knowing she needed the best care available, she chose MedStar Georgetown University Hospital for her treatment, and made an appointment with Jennifer Son, MD, FACS, a breast surgeon.

"I really believe that you should always work with providers who include you in all decisions and make you feel like part of their team. That's how I felt with my entire team at MedStar Georgetown."

— Shannon Swickard

"As a young healthcare provider, Shannon reminded me of myself," says Dr. Son. "We went over all the options and possibilities for treatment and talked through her choices. I wanted to make sure she didn't feel rushed in making a

decision, just as I would want if I were in her position."

"Dr. Son treated me like a colleague," Shannon says. "She was calming and reassuring, and she didn't just see me as a patient she would be operating on—she saw me as a young woman with breast cancer."

"Dr. Son...didn't just see me as a patient she would be operating on—she saw me as a young woman with breast cancer."

— Shannon Swickard

After discussions with her medical team—including plastic surgeon Kenneth Fan, MD—and additional oncology consultations, Shannon decided on a two-step procedure: a lumpectomy and breast lift to remove the cancer, followed by a double mastectomy.

With the two-step series, she would avoid radiation and chemotherapy. "It was definitely the hardest decision I've ever made," she says. "I knew there was no going back."

Dr. Son performed the lumpectomy alongside Dr. Fan soon after Shannon's diagnosis, and Shannon was able to resume her usual activities about eight weeks after the procedure.

"With newer mastectomy techniques, we are able to preserve the entire breast envelope," says Dr. Son. She performed a nipple- and nerve-sparing double mastectomy for Shannon shortly after her 30th birthday, allowing her to maintain as much physical sensation as possible.

At the ten-month mark after her surgery, Shannon was feeling

happy, healthy, and strong—and she was back to being active. She had already resumed running and even started practicing yoga regularly. She continued to see Dr. Son for check-ups every six months to ensure the cancer did not return.

Today, Shannon is still feeling her best and remains committed to her active lifestyle.

"When you have cancer, a lot of your decisions get taken away," Shannon says. "I really believe that you should always work with providers who include you in all decisions and make you feel like part of their team. That's how I felt with my entire team at MedStar Georgetown, and I am so incredibly grateful for each of them."

For more information, please visit **MedStarHealth.org/BreastCancerSurgery**. To schedule an appointment, call **202-444-7055**.



Meet Jennifer Son, MD

Visit **MedStarHealth.org/JenniferSonMD**.



With a smooth swing and steady stance, Gary is back on the golf course after spinal surgery.

Photo courtesy of Gary Monroe

right, so I went to see my primary care physician," explains Gary.

An MRI revealed Gary had a lumbar spondylolisthesis, a condition that occurs when one vertebra slips forward on top of the one below it. When this happens, the canal within the spinal column, which houses and protects the spinal nerves, can get narrower and cause compression or pinching of the nerve roots.

Coincidentally, Gary's nephew was experiencing the same problem and had spine surgery performed by Jean-Marc Voyadzis, MD, neurosurgeon and co-director of the Center for Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. "My nephew was thrilled with the surgery results. He urged me to call Dr. Voyadzis," says Gary.

MedStar Georgetown is well known for its expertise in treating complex spinal conditions like Gary's, offering a full spectrum of care, from minimally invasive procedures to advanced techniques like robotic-assisted surgery. The multidisciplinary approach ensures that patients receive

comprehensive care, addressing both the physical and neurological aspects of spinal health.

"I was up and walking without pain within two hours of the surgery."

– Gary Monroe

But at 78, Gary was nervous about undergoing spine surgery. "I did my research," he says. "I watched a video of Dr. Voyadzis discussing the procedure and it increased my confidence that this doctor knew what he was doing." Gary made an appointment that week.

"Dr. Voyadzis explained everything," says Gary. "My wife, Linda, and I were thrilled to hear he could do the surgery using a less invasive approach and without general anesthesia."

"The standard of care for the treatment of lumbar spondylolisthesis when conservative therapies have failed is a lumbar fusion," explains Dr. Voyadzis. "Traditionally, it is

done while the patient is under general anesthesia. What is exciting about Mr. Monroe's surgery is that we were able to use minimally invasive techniques and robotics to perform a spinal fusion with spinal anesthesia."

"The anesthetic process involves numbing the body from the waist down (spinal anesthesia) and light sedation for the duration of the surgery," explains Dhiraj Jagasia, MD, director of Acute Pain and Regional Anesthesia at MedStar Georgetown. "The advantage for patients is less post-op pain, shorter recovery, and none of the potential side effects of general anesthesia."

Awake spine surgery, as performed by Drs. Voyadzis and Jagasia, is the first of its kind offered in the Washington, D.C., region. They both cautioned that not every patient is a candidate and patients must undergo a thorough screening process. Dr. Jagasia and Dr. Voyadzis work together to determine the best procedure for each patient. For patients like Gary, this approach not only means less pain and a quicker recovery but also a smoother return to daily life with minimal disruption. MedStar Health provides the full spectrum of spine treatments, ensuring that every patient receives a personalized plan tailored to their unique needs and medical history.

Gary says he couldn't be happier with his outcome. "I was up and walking without pain within two hours of the surgery," he says. "I stayed at the hospital for only one night." Once home, Gary started six weeks of physical therapy. "They were amazed at how quickly I recovered. I feel very privileged in having Dr. Voyadzis as my surgeon along with the excellent facilities at MedStar Georgetown," he says.

For more information or to make an appointment, visit **MedStarHealth.org/SpineServices** or call **301-856-2323**.



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MedStar Georgetown University Hospital becomes first in the region to offer lifesaving FDA-approved TIL therapy for metastatic melanoma.

By Justine Hudock



MedStar Georgetown University Hospital is proud to be the first in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area to offer tumor-infiltrating lymphocyte (TIL) therapy, an FDA-approved treatment for metastatic melanoma.

This breakthrough immunotherapy harnesses a patient's own immune system by extracting cancer-fighting white blood cells from a tumor, expanding them in the lab, and reinfusing them to better target and destroy cancer.

"This treatment offers incredible new hope for patients with advanced melanoma, providing a chance for lasting remission and improved outcomes," says Geoffrey T. Gibney, MD, director of the Solid Tumor Cellular Therapy program and leader of the Melanoma Disease Group at MedStar Georgetown. "It has the potential to extend life and improve quality of life in ways we have never seen before."

Research to advance the therapy to approval was conducted at cancer centers across the U.S., including our research engine, Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center, the only NCI-designated comprehensive cancer center in the region.

Visit [MedStarHealth.org/TIL](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/TIL) for more information. To schedule an appointment, call **202-993-0492**.

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