

At Long Last, Pain Relieved

Texas woman travels to BMH for complex procedure

By Will DeShong, Eagle Staff Writer

Candice Collins of Houston, Texas, spent 15 months seeking a cure from debilitating pain attacks in her right ear.

On July 23, Dr. Michael Horowitz at Butler Memorial Hospital ended that pain by doing brain surgery in a procedure most doctors wouldn't attempt.

"It was a life changing surgery," said Collins, 27, who felt an immediate improvement in her health.

The attacks, she said, would come in waves that felt as if an ice pick was striking the side of her head.

Collins had been a straight-A student at a community college in Houston before her symptoms emerged seemingly out of nowhere.

"I woke up one day and my life was over," the mother of two young girls said.

As the attacks became more and more frequent, she stopped school. She reached a point where she couldn't go more than 48 hours without an attack.

She heavily depended on the help of her friends and family to make it through the days.

"I once had to ask a friend to drive 45 minutes to make my kids a peanut butter sandwich," she said.

She visited multiple doctors and was prescribed various

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Candice Collins, 27, who suffered from debilitating ear pain

medications, including \$600 ear drops.

Nothing stopped the pain, and doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong.

After hours of research online, Collins said she figured out what might be causing the pain on her own.

"I did it through self-diagnosis," she said. "It was through process of elimination."

Collins said she narrowed her symptoms to conditions known as geniculate neuralgia and glossopharyngeal neuralgia — rare disorders that result in severe pain in and around the ear.

While she had an idea of what was wrong with her, Collins said finding a doctor to treat the disorder was even more difficult than diagnosing it.

There are no medications that cure the pain, which is caused by

nerve damage due to blood vessels growing on the nerves.

It can only be fixed through surgery, and most neurosurgeons won't attempt the complex procedure, which carries a 10 percent chance of hearing loss or facial paralysis.

But Collins discovered Horowitz by searching online and determining he could do the surgery. It prompted Collins to travel 1,200 miles to Butler Memorial.

The long trip was worth it, Collins said.

"I can't wait to be a mom again," she said. "My youngest doesn't know me without pain."

Collins isn't the first out-of-state patient treated by Horowitz.

The doctor said he has treated patients from as far away as Ecuador.

The influx of brain surgery patients began at Butler when Horowitz relocated here two years ago from UPMC in Pittsburgh.

He and his partners, Richard Spiro and Pedro Aguilar, moved out of Allegheny County after the split between UPMC and Highmark.

But the move to a smaller community hasn't limited his practice.

"Butler turned out to be a very capable complex in a community setting," Horowitz said. "We do everything up here that we did



Dr. Michael Horowitz of BMH performed the complex surgery to cure the Texas woman who had suffered for months with debilitating pain.

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down there."

That includes a variety of complex surgical procedures that few other doctors will attempt.

"You don't have to go downtown into the city to get high quality surgery," he said.

The doctors treat about 400 cases per year, triple what the hospital handled before their arrival.

"We want to grow Butler into a fully equipped neurological center," Horowitz said.

The doctor said hospitals in smaller communities can be just as attractive to patients as those in large cities.

"People just want their surgery done well," Horowitz said, adding the quality in all specialties in Butler is "quite high."