

At 88, Anne is Walking Again After a Spine Fracture

The arrival of summer meant the start of the Water Walkers, an hour-long exercise class that 88-year-old Anne Butler was excited to attend at her local pool. But she made it to only a few sessions before she fell on her right side as she pushed open a heavy bathroom door. Instead of walking in the water, she found herself in a hospital bed at VHC Health.

Anne suffered a very severe spine fracture. “She had a severely unstable spinal injury, with a fracture pattern very unusual for a ground level fall,” says **Matthew Piazza, MD**, who determined that surgery was necessary.

A neurosurgeon, Dr. Piazza has a special interest in degenerative spinal conditions, spinal oncology and traumatic injuries to the spine. After earning his medical degree at Columbia University, he completed his residency in neurosurgery at the University of Pennsylvania where he also received subspecialized, training as a complex spine fellow.

“For Anne’s surgery, I used a minimally invasive technique to place screws and rods through several small incisions at various locations along her spine,” Dr. Piazza says. “This means less blood loss, less tissue disruption and a shorter surgery.”

He also used computerized navigation to perform Anne’s surgery to repair



Dr. Piazza discusses treatment options with a patient.

the fracture. “We have surgical GPS to see exactly where we are placing screws without having to expose the spine,” says Dr. Piazza, who recently joined VHC Health’s medical staff. “In stereotactic navigation surgery, screens in the operating room show precisely where I place my instruments in a 3D-reconstructed CT scan. It’s highly accurate and decreases risk to patients.”

In Anne’s case, the goal of the surgery was to stabilize the fracture so she could walk again. “Without the operation, Anne would have had debilitating pain and would not even have been able to sit up,” says Dr. Piazza.

After surgery, Anne recovered at VHC Health for a couple of weeks. Then, she spent 10 days on the hospital’s Inpatient

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“The successful outcome of this complex spine surgery is a testament to Dr. Piazza’s unique skill set. We are very fortunate to have him as part of the neurosurgery team and larger VHC Health community.”

RICHARD D. MURRAY, MD,
CHIEF OF NEUROSURGERY

Rehabilitation Unit. “I could walk down the whole gym before I left the hospital,” she says. “It was wonderful. I am much stronger than when I came here. Without surgery, I would have been in bed for the rest of my life.”

Dr. Piazza says Anne’s recovery is remarkable. “She had a terrible injury, but by using modern surgical techniques to achieve fracture stabilization, she has a good, functional outcome with minimal pain,” he says. “Today’s technology is key. It lets us perform fusion, fracture stabilization, and decompression surgery less invasively and with greater accuracy. There’s nothing better than giving patients their function back—the ability to walk or use their hands again. It gives me great satisfaction.”

Anne’s good fortitude and overall positive attitude helped in her recovery too.

“I believe in trying to make the best of things,” Anne says. “I’m proof that life is possible even after very bad things.”

