

Charles Bissler, 85, enjoys helping his daughter with her competitive horse-training farm in Newbury.



# back in the saddle

a spinal cord stimulator helps patients 'do almost anything' again

by sheri kightlinger

When he is not helping his daughter with her competitive horse-training farm in Newbury, 85-year-old Charles Bissler can be found relaxing. Finally. After 18 months of nonstop back and leg pain that kept him up all night, Bissler is now able to sleep as long as he wants because of his new spinal cord stimulator. He's even walking normally again.

A retired foreman with NASA, Bissler tried everything to find relief. He started with a neurosurgeon who prescribed stretch and water therapy. He tried acupuncture, then chiropractic therapy and spinal injections. "These treatments all helped temporarily," Bissler explains. "Then the pain just came roaring back. I was really miserable."

### \* researching treatment options

After learning about the benefits of a spinal cord stimulator from a doctor friend, Bissler checked out the technology and researched who performed it in the Cleveland area. He was impressed with the comprehensive care offered through Hillcrest's Pain Management Center and headed there to work with Sameh Yonan, M.D.

"Mr. Bissler has severe disease in his back due to spinal stenosis and lumbar degenerative disc disease. He was unable to tolerate pain medication because of the side effects and was not a good candidate for surgery," Dr. Yonan explains.

Spinal stenosis causes a narrowing in the spine. The narrowing puts pressure on the nerves and spinal cord, and this often can cause pain. Degenerative disc disease refers to a syndrome in which a compromised disc causes low back pain. It is a common finding in people age 60 and older.

After a comprehensive evaluation, and review of all the other treatments and drugs that Bissler tried, Dr. Yonan recommended neuromodulation therapy. This includes the spinal cord stimulator for difficult-to-treat back and leg pain.

### \* taking a 'test drive'

"While this is not a well-known treatment for spinal stenosis, I have had a very positive outcome with neuromodulation therapy with

my senior patients," Dr. Yonan says. "This treatment offers excellent pain relief, improves functionality and increases the patient's quality of life. Another benefit is that this treatment decreases the need for potent pain medications and eliminates the intolerable side effects associated with them."

After discussing options and outcomes, Bissler was eager to try the spinal cord stimulator. A trial was initiated, and a temporary stimulator was surgically implanted to allow Bissler to "test-drive" the therapy. "It was working so well in March, I had Dr. Yonan surgically implant the permanent unit at Hillcrest," Bissler says.

Bissler's implant is a small wire connected to a power source that was surgically implanted under his skin. Low-level electrical signals are then transmitted through the wire to the spinal cord or to specific nerves to block pain signals from reaching the brain. Using a magnetic remote control, Bissler can turn the current on and off, or adjust the current and intensity he feels. "It is working wonderfully, and I do not even feel it," Bissler says.

Dr. Yonan is very pleased with his progress. "His outcome is positive," Dr. Yonan says. And while Bissler still has some pain in his feet and ankles, the spinal cord stimulator is controlling pain in more than 80 percent of his target area.

With a restful night's sleep, Bissler is able to do most anything. For now, he's enjoying helping his daughter on the horse farm. **v&v**

A retired foreman with NASA, Bissler tried everything to find relief.



After a year and a half of nonstop back and leg pain that kept him up all night, Bissler is now able to sleep because of his new spinal cord stimulator.

## from the horse's mouth

For more information on the Cleveland Clinic Pain Management Center at Hillcrest Hospital, please call **440-312-7246**.

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