



# FROM AROUND THE WORLD

*People travel around the globe to BNI for innovative care from world-renowned brain and spine specialists.*

Take a walk through Barrow Neurological Institute®, and you're likely to meet people from around the world—Argentina, Singapore, Qatar, Nepal, Holland, Portugal, Germany, Saudi Arabia. They come to BNI for two main reasons: to obtain care that is unavailable in their own country and to receive treatment from the institute's world-renowned neurosurgeons and neurologists. The offices of Drs. Volker Sonntag and Robert Spetzler estimate that as many as 25 percent of their patients come from outside the U.S.

**“We’re one of only a few centers in the entire world doing this kind of surgery.” — Dr. Curtis Dickman, BNI neurosurgeon**

## Greta Fennis, Holland

When Greta Fennis heard how surgeons in Holland proposed to remove the large tumor that was pressing against her lung, she was horrified. The surgery—a thoracotomy—would require making an 18” incision



Dr. Curtis Dickman (left) removed Greta Fennis' grapefruit-sized tumor through four small holes in her chest wall. After leaving the hospital, Greta and her husband Tom (above) spent a few days in Phoenix before flying home.



around her chest wall to remove the grapefruit-sized schwannoma, a benign tumor that arose from a nerve adjacent to the spinal cord and was growing into her chest cavity. Afterwards, she would undergo several days of sedation for pain, a two-week hospital stay and six to eight weeks of recovery. She would be left with a large scar and extensive damage to her chest wall.

“I have only one body,” says Greta. “Your body, your health is the most important thing you have. Being a flight attendant, I lift lots of heavy things and wouldn’t be able to work for six to seven months.”

So her husband Tom, a computer consultant, hit the Internet to explore their options. After sifting through hours of information, Tom came across an article about thoracoscopy, a type of endoscopic surgery used to remove tumors in the chest cavity. Its author, BNI’s Dr. Curtis Dickman, described how a thoracic tumor can be dissected and then removed through several

small holes made in the chest—resulting in less pain, faster recovery, and less tissue damage and scarring than a thoracotomy. The couple took the article to several surgeons in Holland.

“They were not just a little bit against it—they were very much against it. They said it was impossible to remove such a large tumor endoscopically,” says Greta. “That made it very difficult for us.”

Unwilling to give up on the endoscopic option, they contacted Dr. Dickman.

“We’re one of only a few centers in the entire world doing this kind of surgery,” says Dr. Dickman, who has performed more than 300 thoracoscopic spine surgeries and written the only textbook on the topic. “They sent me her x-rays and MRI studies and we communicated half a dozen times through email. They had lots of questions because of the issues the Holland doctors had raised.”

On August 28, Greta and Tom came to BNI for a consultation and decided to have Dr. Dickman remove the tumor endoscopically. “That was the biggest relief for me,” Greta says. “If I

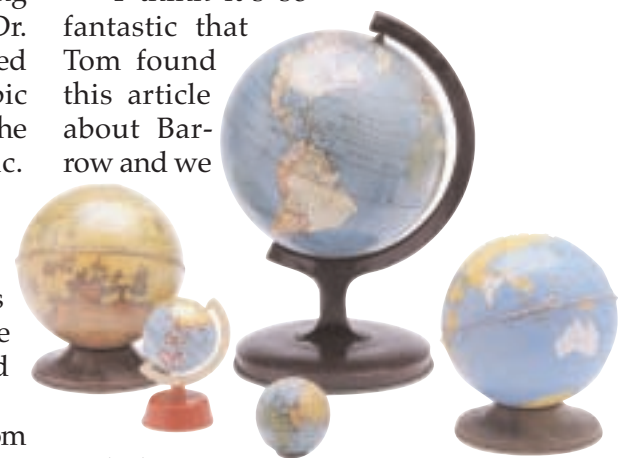
had stayed in Holland, then I would have always had the thought in the back of my mind, ‘Have I done the right thing?’”

On Sept. 8, Dr. Dickman completely removed the tumor in a seven-hour endoscopic procedure. Working through four small incisions in her chest wall, Dr. Dickman used miniature surgical tools to detach the tumor from the spine, dissect it and pull the pieces through the tiny holes.

Less than a week later, Greta left the hospital, and on Sept. 19, Tom and Greta flew home.

“I think it’s so fantastic that

Tom found this article about Barrow and we



ended

up here,” says Greta. “I immediately felt I was in the right hands. That was a really good feeling.”



### Lucas Rodriguez Benitez, the Canary Islands, Spain

The black blotch on the CT scan looked ominous—and it was. A follow-up MRI showed that four-year-old Lucas Rodriguez Benitez had an arteriovenous malformation (AVM), a congenital tangle of arteries and veins located in his brain. Already Lucas had suffered a seizure, so his parents, Octavio and Nanchi, were worried that hemorrhaging had already occurred. More bleeding could result in serious neurological problems and even death.

AVMs can be treated with surgery, embolization, radiosurgery or a combination of these. Spanish surgeons recommended embolization, a procedure in which glue is injected into the vessels to close off blood circulation.

“I was not satisfied with that suggestion,” says Octavio, who is a maritime lawyer. “I traveled to Madrid, to Barcelona, and I started exploring the Internet. I found the name of a neurosurgeon, and I wrote him a letter about my concerns, asking him specifically for the best place in the world for this. He told me Barrow was the best—in particular, Dr.

[Robert] Spetzler.”

Octavio sent Dr. Spetzler Lucas’ records, and after reviewing them, Dr. Spetzler recommended surgery, along with embolization, to remove the AVM.

On March 30, Dr. Cameron McDougall performed a four-hour embolization to seal off the main vessels in the AVM, and the following day, Dr. Spetzler carefully removed the AVM during a 12-hour procedure.

“On the second [of April], we left the hospital and on the sixth we flew home. Amazing!” says Octavio.

As for Lucas, he’s back to his active four-year-old ways.

### Lev Isakov, Russia

By 1997, Parkinson’s disease had left Lev Isakov barely able to stand, walk or even talk. His daughter Olga Issakova, who had moved with her husband from Moscow to Tucson, asked a local physician where she should take her father for his Parkinson’s, and he recommended BNI’s Muhammad Ali Parkinson Research Center.

Olga scheduled an appointment during her father’s next visit. At that appointment, Lev was given a prescription for pramipexole, a Parkinson’s drug that was approved by the FDA in 1997 but is still not available in Russia. The medication greatly improved Lev’s posture, movement and speech.

“The last three years, he’s spent six months here



Dr. Mark Stacy assesses Lev Isakov’s condition during an appointment at the Muhammad Ali Parkinson Research Center.

[in Tucson] so he gets all his treatments here. He doesn’t go to a neurologist in Russia at all any more. Dr. [Mark] Stacy writes a letter stating that he’s getting treatment here that he cannot get in Russia. They have never denied him a visa,” says Olga. “Dr. Stacy is well acquainted with his condition and really helps him.”

Now 70, Lev maintains an active lifestyle that includes gardening, caring for grandchildren both in Moscow and Tucson, traveling with his wife and learning to navigate the Internet.

“I don’t have time for disease,” says the former scientist. ●

