

Patients, residents, colleagues Touched by Dr. Spetzler

Editor's note: We asked former patients and residents of Barrow to share thoughts about Dr. Spetzler's accomplishments and his impact on their lives. Here is what they said:

"The aneurysm was leaking, and it was a really critical moment. We didn't know if Enrique would survive. A neurologist at University Medical Center recommended that we fly Enrique to Dr. Spetzler. Even now – it's been a year and a half – we get chills up and down our spines when we talk about the amazing surgery he performed on our son. It's something we'll never forget."

– Manuel Uzueta, whose son Enrique underwent a cardiac standstill in March 2002 after an aneurysm burst in his brain. Enrique is now 8 and a second-grader in Tucson.

"Dr. Spetzler is the consummate master of neurosurgery, but more impressive than his technical innovations, unsurpassed surgical results, and countless scientific contributions is his impact as a mentor. His confidence, courage and inner strength are the qualities that emerge in the operating room and leave those around him inspired. The next generation of leaders in neurosurgery has come



to Phoenix to witness his talent, as if to see a surgical aesthetic so exquisite and so rare that it is unlikely to be seen again. His mentorship inspires young neurosurgeons to follow his example, to aspire to his level of expertise and to perpetuate a difficult and demanding craft. Dr. Spetzler's legacy will be, among other things, the high standards he has set, which permeate the practice of neurosurgery now and for generations."

– Michael T. Lawton, MD, former Barrow Neurosurgery Chief Resident and now a neurosurgeon at the University of California San Francisco



"This is the miracle of neurosurgery. A man with a scalpel inside the critical vein in my brain, trying to cut out a tumor the size of a golf ball, blood gushing out at up to a litre a minute, making it impossible to see what's happening. How could he be sure what he was cutting? He was partly helped by technology, but also by his innate ability. Dr [Steven] Shedd explained, 'Dr Spetzler's got a tremendous ability to know what's there without actually being able to see it. It's probably his strongest attribute as a neurosurgeon – his ability to see in 3-D without really physically being able to see.'

Dr. Spetzler performed a very aggressive procedure that other neurosurgeons I had seen had considered too dangerous and too risky. This, in my opinion, does not indicate that Dr. Spetzler takes more risks than other neurosurgeons. I believe this indicates that Dr. Spetzler's skill level, expertise and the team and environment he has built up around him over the past 20 years are just much superior to that of other neurosurgeons."

– Tom Bible, who underwent surgery in March 2001 to remove a benign meningioma growing inside the superior sagittal sinus. Today, he works as a photo-journalist in London, England.



"First and foremost, Robert has a creative, artistic and scientific genius that simply is not found to the same degree in any other human being, surgeon or otherwise. He has the remarkable ability to find a way to treat the untreatable neurosurgical disorder. He has an uncanny, almost four-dimensional sense of neuroanatomy and a reverent appreciation of eloquent structures and how specific pathology misshapes and distorts those structures. He's truly in a class by himself.

Beyond that, what really distinguishes Robert Spetzler in the Neu-

rosurgical community is the training paradigm he's established at Barrow in Neurosurgical post-graduate training. When I completed my residency in June of 1988, not only was I well-trained in patient management and complex neurosurgical techniques, but I had 55 publications, had been awarded three national residency prizes and had achieved scientific grant support – all for extracurricular neurosurgical projects accomplished during my tenure in training under Dr. Spetzler's mentorship. That's where the foundation for my career was laid, and I've gone on to follow in Dr. Spetzler, Dr. [Volker] Sonntag and Dr. [Andrew] Shetter's footsteps."

– Mark Hadley, MD, neurosurgeon at the University of Alabama. Dr. Hadley was the first Neurosurgery resident to begin and complete his training under Dr. Spetzler at Barrow.

"I came to Barrow in May 2001 in order to have a craniotomy on my brainstem. My condition was a cavernous angioma in the cervical medullary junction of the brainstem, an area I was told was crucial to life – and death – 'the highest real estate of the body.'

Five years previously, I had experienced a brain hemorrhage,

which had given me temporary stroke-like deficits, but due to good luck, and maybe a bit of youth, I had made a full recovery. It took me six years to find Dr. Spetzler, because no other surgeon I saw (in London, Geneva and New York) would do the surgery, claiming that an operation might well leave me with permanent deficits, or kill me. However, they did all agree that by leaving my condition as was, I was likely to have another hemorrhage, which could also leave me disabled or dead.

So how has Dr. Spetzler changed my life? In short, I firmly believe he saved it, and I'm not sure how one can quantify that past stating it. The surgery went very well, and I was back at work eight months after the operation. I am still left with some permanent deficits – my left side is numb to pain and temperature, my right side is weaker than the left, and my vision is double if at an extreme angle. But these are tiny things that no one would notice unless I told them and that do not bother me at all. If anything, I rather cherish them, as a daily reminder of how lucky I have been."

– Sacha Bonsor, an author living in London, England

"Twenty years ago I came to Phoenix to be the first resident selected by Dr. Robert Spetzler at Barrow. I had been working with him in Cleveland, Ohio, when he



was offered the position of Chairman of Neurological Surgery by Dr. John Green. He called me into his office and asked if I

would like to move to Phoenix. I had never been to Phoenix, nor did I know anything about the hospital, but I knew that if Robert Spetzler thought it was a great opportunity, I wanted to be a part of it. So off I went to Phoenix, and I have never looked back.

One of the reasons for the success of the Neurosurgery training program at Barrow is that Dr. Spetzler has made teaching one of the highest priorities. The residents and fellows who graduate from this program receive the best training in the world. I certainly owe a great debt of gratitude for the training I received."

– Joseph Zabramski, MD, former Barrow Neurosurgery Chief Resident and now a neurosurgeon practicing at Barrow

"The football players, the basketball players, the movie stars – they're not heroes. Dr. Spetzler is a hero."

– Robert Maher, Phoenix, who suffered a ruptured aneurysm in September 2003 and underwent surgery at Barrow in October. He has made a complete recovery. (See story on page 13.) ■