

Western Pennsylvania

Guide to Good Health

Health News You and Your Family Can Use

**Operation Walk Pittsburgh
Provides Free Orthopaedic
Surgery To Patients
in Latin America** *Page 18*

Senior Care
plus SENIOR LIVING OPTIONS
• ALZHEIMER'S UPDATE
See pages 42-51

**DEFEAT
BACK PAIN**
Page 33

**St. Clair Hospital
Introduces Robotic
Assisted Surgery** *Page 5*

**Advice for
Parents of
Problem Eaters**
Page 40

ASK THE PHARMACIST	4
WOMEN'S HEALTH	8
MEDICAL STUDIES	16
BREAST CANCER	20
MEDICAL PROFILES	24
REHABILITATION	31
CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH	34
NATURAL HEALTH	36
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS	38
ALZHEIMER'S	42
SENIOR RESOURCES	47
SENIOR LIVING	48
DIRECTORY	54

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Operation Walk Led by Dr. Anthony DiGioia Provides Free Orthopaedic Surgery to Patients in Latin America

By John Fries

To say that Anthony DiGioia is a man of accomplishments would be an understatement.

A graduate of Central Catholic High School, he holds a degree in engineering from the Carnegie Mellon University and a medical degree from Harvard Medical School. For the past 20 years, he's maintained a busy orthopaedic surgery practice; odds are that if you live in the Pittsburgh area, you or someone you know has received a new hip or knee, courtesy of his expertise and skilled hands. As a medical researcher, he's led a number of projects, including one funded by a grant by the National Science Foundation to improve how such surgical procedures are performed. He's planned and presented many educational seminars and conferences for his fellow surgeons. And if you've been fortunate enough to work with him—as I did during the 1990s when we were both at UPMC Shadyside—you know that he's also a genuinely caring physician. Three years ago,

DiGioia, who practices orthopaedic surgery through his group, Renaissance Orthopaedics, at Magee-Womens Hospital of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, launched a humanitarian effort called Operation Walk Pittsburgh. The initiative is a satellite program of Los Angeles-based Operation Walk, which was established in 1994 by Lawrence Dorr, MD to provide free hip and knee replacements for patients in developing countries and the United States who have no access to arthritis treatment. During the past 17 years, Operation Walk teams have traveled to more than 12 countries and provided surgical procedures to, literally, thousands of patients.

Operation Walk Pittsburgh was started by DiGioia in 2008. The team, which includes several doctors, affiliated medical professionals and a number of others under DiGioia's leadership, is now planning its third visit to Latin America. Once there, they will spend several days performing life-changing hip and knee surgical procedures for as many as 50 individuals. They will also provide education in advanced treatments and surgical techniques to orthopaedic surgeons, nurses, physical therapists and other healthcare professionals in the area. The surgeries, combined with medical education, make a lasting contribution to patients and their care.

The entire effort is voluntary. Neither patients nor their families will see bills. Everything—from medical expertise to thousands of dollars in supplies—is donated.



Dr. DiGioia and members of his family (left to right) Cathy DiGioia, Angela DiGioia, Tony DiGioia, Maria DiGioia, Noelle DiGioia with patients in Guatemala who received free joint replacements surgeries just a few days earlier from Operation Walk Pittsburgh.

Participants donate their vacation time to be a part of this program.

For DiGioia, the idea for Operation Walk Pittsburgh started with a conversation. "I often plan conferences for surgeons," says DiGioia, "and so does Dr. Dorr. We've attended each other's conferences and would always talk about Operation Walk, which he created as a team-based program (there are currently nine teams in the United States and one in Canada)."

For DiGioia, the first step in Operation Walk Pittsburgh was to build a team. He recruited Tom Maidens and Janice Harmon, nurses at Magee-Womens Hospital, to serve as the program's logistics coordinators. Volunteers, ranging from medical professionals at various hospitals (not on in Pittsburgh, but as far away as Boston and Florida) to members of his own family, signed on to be part of the program.

An undertaking of this nature is extremely expensive. "Each trip costs about \$100,000," says DiGioia, "and that's in addition to between \$250,000 and \$300,000 in donated medical supplies." Fortunately, AMD3, the charitable medical foundation established in 2003 by DiGioia and managed by Tom Hoffman, became the development arm of the new organization. Once everything was in place, Dorr added Operation Walk Pittsburgh to his growing network.

Operation Walk Pittsburgh is a labor of love for all involved, but, notes DiGioia, it's very time-consuming. "The logistics are incredible," he says. "Between 50 and 55 people take part in each of our trips, and there are about 8,000 pounds of medical supplies shipped eight weeks before the trip."

The group traveled to Antigua, Guatemala in 2009 and 2010 – a

Continued on following page

Bone and Joint Health Series

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Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC
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Auditorium, Zero Level

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- What is Arthritis and What are the Non-Operative Treatment Options?
- Surgical Options for Hip, Knee Arthritis
- When is it Time to Consider Joint Replacement Surgery?
- Exercises Before & After Joint Replacement
- Expert Panel with Past Patients



Anthony DiGioia, MD
(Course Chairman)

Jointly sponsored by:

The AMD3 Foundation
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Register Today!

Call 412-641-1924 or visit
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During the past 17 years, Operation Walk teams have traveled to more than 12 countries and provided surgical procedures to, literally, thousands of patients.

ASK THE EXPERT: Washington Orthopedics & Sports Medicine

Q: My husband has been told he needs knee surgery and keeps putting it off. What are the risks of delaying knee replacement surgery?

A: The goal of knee replacement surgery is to restore function and to decrease pain.

If the x-rays indicate, and your husband is symptomatic enough, he is a candidate for knee replacement surgery. Delaying treatment means he will endure further pain and suffering, and while there's no real risk in this delay, the arthritis in his knee may worsen over time. This may cause him to limit his activity because he's in pain which may present problems for recovery if he chooses to have surgery at a later time.

The better his motor function is before surgery, the better his knee will bend after surgery. This in itself is an important part of the physical therapy needed postoperatively.

Also, because he is in pain, he may find himself limping. This can cause problems in the other knee and/or also in the lumbar region.

Joint replacement surgery is major surgery. However, if conservative treatments have not helped and he's still experiencing pain, joint replacement will help him return to a healthy lifestyle much sooner.

Most patients spend 2-4 days in the hospital, must be very patient and compliant with postoperative care and therapy, and can expect a complete recovery in 2-6 months.



By Allan Tissenbaum, M.D.

Washington Orthopedics and Sports Medicine

> For more information or to make an appointment, you can reach **Dr. Tissenbaum at (724) 206-0610** or visit www.washortho.com.

Operation Walk

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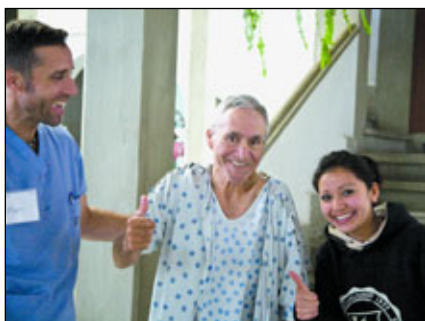
trip that not only involved a lengthy flight but a two-hour drive into the mountains via old schoolbuses, complete with luggage on the roofs. This year's mission, set for September, will go to Panama City, Panama, and future annual trips are planned.

"When we first arrive, there are between 70 and 80 candidates for surgery waiting along with their family members," says DiGioia. "Four of five operating rooms at a local hospital are made available to us, and early in the week, a huge clinic takes place; we meet with each candidate and evaluate him or her for surgery. Then, we spend the next three days performing surgery and our final three days helping the patients and local staff transition the patients through recovery."

DiGioia finds the experience thoroughly gratifying. "The people of Guatemala are very compassionate and family-focused," he says. "And our work there is very much a team effort. There no no job descriptions."

Operation Walk Pittsburgh has begun providing charity care at home. Last November, three patients were selected to receive free joint replacements at Magee-Womens Hospital. Hospital medical staff members and UPMC waived their fees. The initiative will take place again this November.

DiGioia expresses gratitude for all the people who have donated, and continue to donate, their time and skills to the Operation Walk Pittsburgh. In addition to DiGioia, UPMC physicians on the team include include orthopedic surgeons Brian Hamlin, Anton Plakseychuk and Michael Weiss and anesthesiologists Anna Uskova, Nasr Yazigi and Chris Edelmann.



Francisco is thumbs up after a PT session with Marc Marchese and his student aide

To learn more about Operation Walk Pittsburgh, to volunteer or to provide support, visit www.operationwalkpgh.org.

Local Health Series Educates Residents on Bone and Joint Health

By Tom Hoffman

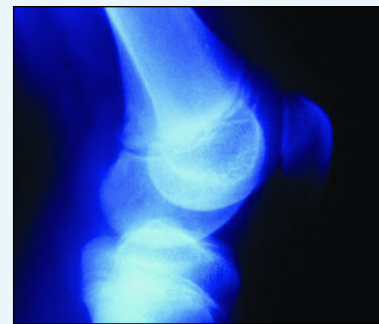
The Bone and Joint Health Series, now in its 10th year, is a free educational series that provides the community with the opportunity to learn about bone and joint health and have their questions answered directly by experts. An initiative of the AMD3 Foundation and Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC, the Bone and Joint Health Series (BJHS) has reached thousands of residents in Western Pennsylvania.

The series features experts who specialize in hip and knee arthritis care, joint replacement, arthritis pain management, and diet and exercise. Covering a variety of topics, the goal of the BJHS is to improve communication and knowledge so that patients and their physicians together can make informed choices regarding disease treatment and maintenance of health.

Dr. Tony DiGioia, founder of the AMD3 Foundation, states, "With the growing needs of patients with hip and knee arthritis in Western Pennsylvania, there is an increased need to provide awareness and education. The Bone and Joint Health Series is our foundation's way of providing outreach within the community."

The half-day BJHS events feature local physicians and health care providers and also include past patients that have experienced bone and joint health issues and are now recovered. "I am happy I [am] able to help and offer my voice of experience," says Vicky Russell, one of the guest speakers that has shared her journey to wellness at past BJHS events.

The BJHS also features displays from medical companies and providers involved with bone and joint care and is a well-rounded forum for the community to learn more about bone and joint health by through the eyes of patients, physicians, and other care providers.



The next BJHS event, **So You Think You Need Total Joint Replacement? Begin Your Journey to Wellness Right Here!**, will be held on **Saturday, October 15** at Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC. Admission is free, but advance registration is required. Register today by calling (412) 641-1924 or visiting www.boneandjointhealth.org.

> **If you would like to bring a BJHS event to your facility or location, contact Tom Hoffman at (412) 641-1924.**

COVER PHOTO: Dr. Anthony DiGioia III, Operation Walk Pittsburgh leader, with daughter Angela interpreting, speaks with a patient's family member in Guatemala, providing an update on her loved one's surgery.
OPERATION WALK PHOTOS: Erinn Aloï of A Fresh Focus Photography

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