

Patient Success Story

Mike Dunham looks back on the summer of 2009 as the “time he fell asleep,” and describes his wife, Debbie, as a “true hero” who stepped up to make sure he got the best health care possible.



Mr. Dunham’s experience was more than a long summer’s nap! It all began the Monday morning after the July 4th weekend. He had experienced severe pain while in California for a conference and went to see Dr. Maurice Goins as soon as he returned home.

“He came into the office with severe neck pain and mild weakness and described pain like ‘lightning bolts going down his spine’. I ordered a MRI immediately, and it revealed a retropharyngeal abscess and an epidural abscess with discitis and severe spinal erosion. Within 30 minutes, he was paralyzed and unable to walk or move his arm,” Dr. Goins said.

By 8 p.m. that evening, Dr. Goins had Mr. Dunham in the operating room, and the surgery lasted until 3 a.m. “We performed extensive spinal surgery, decompressing his spinal cord by removing the infected vertebral body, and stabilized his spine with plates, screws, rods and a halo,” Dr. Goins said.

“Three of my spinal vertebra had practically dissolved because of a staph infection,” Dunham said. His life-threatening condition started as a staph infection that began as a sinus infection.

After surgery, Dunham was “asleep” in the ICU at Fayette County Community Hospital for 21 days. During this time, Dunham said his wife “stepped up and engaged a lot of folks” as she managed his complex care.

“I lost 50 pounds, suffered congestive heart failure and had renal failure,” Dunham said about his condition. Only afterward did Dunham and his family know that doctors thought

he had about a 15 percent chance of surviving and that Dr. Goins thought he would never walk again.

When he was strong enough to leave the ICU and start rehab, Dunham’s wife helped arrange for him to be transferred to Shepherd Center. There, Dunham says he “spent two weeks going from a wheelchair to a walker to crutches and then home with a halo.” When he completed his rehab at Shepherd Center, Dunham walked out using only crutches.

“I did my 14 weeks with the halo and stayed on antibiotics that killed any remaining staph infection. After I got the halo off, I wore a neck brace for nine weeks,” Dunham recalled. Now, two years later, Dunham is back to his normal 65-hour weeks as an executive vice president of the Georgia Branch of the Associated General Contractors and is enjoying playing golf. Throughout his illness and recovery, Dunham’s co-workers managed the workload so that, when he returned to his job, his work responsibilities had been covered. “I can’t thank them enough for all their help and support.” Dunham said.

Dunham and his wife live outside Peachtree City and have two grown daughters, Dana and Ashley.

Maurice L. Goins, MD, received his medical degree from Howard University College of Medicine in Washington, DC. He completed his residency at Howard University Hospital in Washington, DC, and his fellowship in spine surgery at Thomas Jefferson University/Rothman Institute in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Dr. Goins is Board Certified by the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons and a member of the Jefferson Orthopaedic Society, Society for Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery and the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.