

NEWS RELEASE

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Rare Spinal Surgery Gives MLB Player a Miracle and a Second Chance to Return to Baseball

A Cleveland Indians first baseman has arrived in the Valley for spring training after making a remarkable recovery following a debilitating spine injury that nearly shattered his career and left him faced with a risk of complete paralysis. Following an innovative and rare spine surgery at St. Joseph's Barrow Neurological Institute, David Cooper has returned to baseball – a feat many doctors said may never happen.

Cooper, 27, was injured while diving into first base while playing for the Toronto Blue Jays in 2012. His injury was initially described as a jammed neck and upper back spasms, however a MRI two weeks later diagnosed a much more serious ailment – a large herniated disc in his thoracic spine located deep inside his chest cavity. **The herniated disc was compressing and severely deforming the front of his thoracic spinal cord and threatened to permanently paralyze him.** Without surgery, Cooper would never play baseball again and he was told that undergoing the traditional surgical method for his injury would not likely permit him to play professional baseball and held many risks including severe lifelong pain, lung problems, and excessive bleeding.

With limited hope, Cooper was told about a world-renowned spine neurosurgeon in Phoenix who had pioneered a minimally invasive surgical procedure through the chest cavity to treat his injury. Cooper underwent the four hour surgery last April by Curtis Dickman, MD, neurosurgeon at Barrow. Dr. Dickman completely removed the herniated thoracic disc to decompress his spinal cord, and inserted bone grafts, a titanium plate and two titanium screws through several very small incisions in the side of David's chest cavity.

"Although herniated discs are relatively common, Cooper is among 1 to 2 percent of individuals who suffer a herniated disc in his thoracic spine," says Dr. Dickman. "This area of the spine located deep within the chest cavity is very challenging to access, especially when the herniated disc is directly in front of the spinal cord. The surgery we performed is only offered in few places throughout the world and it was David's best hope of returning to baseball. It's remarkable he's made such a spectacular recovery."

Just three months following surgery, Cooper was lifting weights and setting his sights on a return to baseball. He has made a full recovery. A free agent after his injury, Cooper signed a major league contract with the Cleveland Indians in December – something he was told may never happen.

"I'm so happy to be playing professional baseball again," says Cooper. "Without this surgery I would be in excruciating pain and I wouldn't have the opportunity to ever play baseball again."