

One Resident's Journey

From Wyoming to Naperville

This is a real story of one patient who experienced extraordinary hardships before finally gaining a more normal life for the first time in over a decade.

My name is Juliane Zimmerman, and I am 29-years-old. Headaches have been a part of my life since I was 15. When I was a teenager, the problems I had back then didn't seem too bad, but as I got older, the pain got a lot more severe.

Headaches often meant having to lie around in bed, vomiting, and missing work, in addition to affecting my social life. During the past 24 months, the headaches were pretty much constant, and during one period, I actually missed 40-percent of the work year. Fortunately I have a government job, and the people I work for have been very understanding and supportive.

I live in Wyoming, and during the years, I've visited doctors in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and here in Illinois. I've tried to pinpoint the causes of the headaches myself and looked at food, weather, hormones, and everything else I could think of that might have triggered them. The doctors I have seen have represented various specialties and I've been evaluated from a neurologist's perspective, and had MRIs. I've also been seen by an herbalist, a chiropractor, and had acupuncture, Botox, and bio-feedback. My prescription drugs alone have cost me at least \$1700 a year, and over the last 13 years, I've spent so much money seeing specialists.

On a personal level, I'm engaged but we haven't been able to move things along as my life has been crippled by physical issues. Everyone I've seen has pretty much thrown up their hands and said there was nothing more that could be done for me and it's been recommended that I go on work disability, but I felt at 29 years old, I was too young for that.

It was my mother that found out about Dr. Suwan. She read about her in a Naperville newspaper and also had a friend that had seen her. I figured Naperville was a place where a lot of good doctors want to go, so in the late spring of this year, I came out to visit my mom and to see Dr. Suwan.

From the very first visit, I could tell things were different. Dr. Suwan spent an incredible amount of time with me and took more notes than any doctor I have ever seen. A lot of the doctors I had seen repeated a lot of the same steps, but Dr. Suwan worked with me in her own way and never acted like she was on a limited time schedule.

On my very first visit, we tried a nerve block and it gave me good relief, but my headaches needed repeated blocks, and being away in Wyoming made this option not possible. I learned that many patients given a nerve block feel better anywhere from two weeks to six months, but not me. It was then that Dr. Suwan recommended a cutting edge procedure known as occipital nerve stimulation, which would involve installing a small pacemaker-like device in my body near the collar bone through an implant that would be performed by her associate Dr. A. Elborno, who is the medical director of the Adventist Hinsdale Hospital Pain Center of Excellence.

This device is meant to provide long lasting relief, shocking the pain away with a flip of a switch. A solution that may make lots of sense for somebody who is supposed to take care of those intractable headaches, and leave to Wyoming in less than 3 weeks. I admit it took some time to convince myself this was something I had to try. I actually freaked out for a while, but I had some days to think about it because it took a bit of medical office work getting the approval for the coverage that would pay the majority of the cost. The trial period that precedes the actual procedure, made it easier for me to make my decision. I agreed and had the procedure as an outpatient on June 4, and by June 19, I was back home in Wyoming. Three days later, I went back to work.



It's been nearly a month since the procedure, and I have to say I am doing a lot better.

I feel great about being able to shock away my headache with a flip of a switch.

Finally, I am in control of my life. Headaches are not controlling my life any more.

I can't say that I'm pain free, but based on a 100-percent scale, I feel at least 75-percent better. I feel like I've gotten my work and my social life back.

I'm grateful about all the time Dr. Suwan spent with me and the fact she offered me solutions no one else even mentioned. She really thought outside the box when it came to trying to cure my problem, and did something that I think many other doctors don't even know exists.

I'm optimistic that this isn't the last word in terms of my own situation and that one day, the rest of it will work itself out. She is an amazing doctor.

Dr. Nesreen Suwan, a board-certified neurologist and pain management specialist who operates Advanced Chicago Headache Clinic & Dignostics in suburban Lisle. She has helped many pain sufferers return to living a more normal life.

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