

For our friends and supporters.

Patient's Search for "Miracle Worker" Brings Him Back Home

It began four years ago with pins and needles in his left hand. A cancer survivor, Arthur Coia thought he was having a bout of neuropathy, a common side effect of cancer treatment. He wasn't overly concerned until the tingling suddenly started in his right hand.

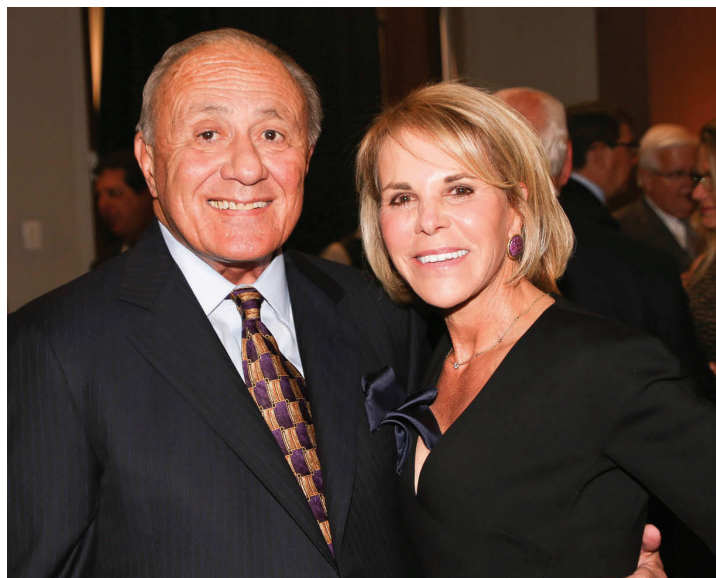
Arthur had enjoyed an active life. A longtime attorney and former president of the one-million-member Laborers' International Union of North America, the lifelong Rhode Islander was an accomplished golfer and professional musician. He enjoyed time with wife Donna, rounds on the course, laps in the pool, and get-togethers with pals.

"Then my hands started going numb," says Arthur, now 75. "Before long, I couldn't even tie my shoes or button my shirt. I lost all dexterity—everything changed."

It would take Arthur two years of appointments at some of the best medical centers in the country to get the correct diagnosis and treatment. Fortunately, all roads ultimately led back to Rhode Island, where Arthur found his "miracle worker"—Ziya Gokaslan, MD.

"Go figure. Right here in my own back yard," says Arthur.

During his two-year odyssey, specialists did their best to address the problem of Arthur's clumsy hands and increasingly unsteady legs. Because he'd had a corrective spine surgery called cervical laminectomy years earlier, doctors looked elsewhere for answers to his pain—carpal tunnel syndrome, for example. "It felt like I was on a



Arthur Coia with his wife Donna Paolino Coia

merry-go-round," says Arthur. Little did he know how delicate his situation was.

In 2016, at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Arthur finally learned what ailed him. The problem wasn't in his hands. It was in his cervical spine, after all. "I had degenerative cervical myelopathy," he says. "It made a kink in my neck and the pinched nerves were cutting off oxygen to my extremities."

Because of his complicated medical history, surgery to decompress his cervical spinal cord was extremely risky. He was told there was one neurosurgeon with the expertise to help, but he was no longer at Johns Hopkins.

That doctor was Ziya Gokaslan, who had recently left Johns Hopkins for Rhode Island Hospital to become



Rhode Island Hospital

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neurosurgeon-in-chief, clinical director of the Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute, and director of the Comprehensive Spine Center.

“I said, ‘Are you kidding me?’” recalls Arthur with a laugh. “I’d gone all around the ballpark and the best neurosurgeon in the world was here in Rhode Island.”

When he arrived for his first appointment with Dr. Gokaslan, the once robust Arthur was using a walker, his legs severely weakened. His neck was buckled into the shape of a reversed “C.”

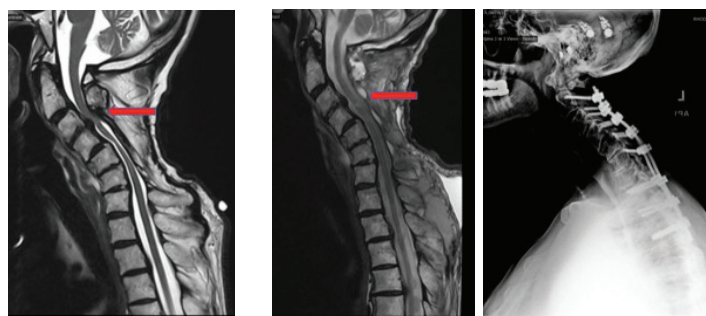
Arthur needed a new operation to fix his cervical spine. Ideally, the complicated surgery would be performed both from the front (anterior) and back (posterior) of the neck. However, damage to Arthur’s throat from cancer treatment eliminated the anterior option; he’d never be able to swallow again. Cervical instability from the earlier laminectomy made posterior surgery extremely delicate.

“Paralysis was a very serious risk,” says Dr. Gokaslan. “But without surgery, he was facing the rest of his life in a wheelchair. It was a very difficult situation.”

With Donna’s support, Arthur carefully weighed his decision. He understood the risks, but had absolute faith in his surgeon. And he wanted his life back. So he told Dr. Gokaslan, “Let’s do it.”

“The very best, like Dr. Gokaslan and his entire team, are here at Rhode Island Hospital, right in our own back yard.”

— Arthur Coia



Pre-op MRI shows compression of spine

Post-op MRI+Xray shows correction



Arthur Coia and Dr. Ziya Gokaslan

On November 17, 2016, in a six-hour operation, the neurosurgeon “unroofed” a 6-inch section of Arthur’s spinal cord. He then inserted 16 screws attached to rods that straightened and stabilized his patient’s neck and chest. When Arthur woke up from the delicate operation, he told Donna, “I feel great! That’s the easiest surgery I’ve ever had!”

That makes Dr. Gokaslan smile. “I was very privileged to be chosen as his surgeon,” he says.

“I’m living my life because of Dr. Gokaslan,” says Arthur.

His deep gratitude extends to the “extraordinary” staff at Rhode Island Hospital and to the Prince family, whose philanthropy established the Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute and attracts world-class doctors like Ziya Gokaslan.

“Thanks to the Princes, people in Rhode Island don’t have to go elsewhere for neurological care, not even Johns Hopkins,” says Arthur. “The very best, like Dr. Gokaslan and his entire team, are here at Rhode Island Hospital, right in our own back yard.”

\$184,000 Gift to Recovery Center Funds Family Support

Since opening last June, the Lifespan Recovery Center has been recognized by state and health care leaders for its unique position to address the opioid epidemic. Operating as a Rhode Island Hospital program, the center provides comprehensive outpatient treatment integrated into a complete medical center for those seeking to overcome opioid use disorder. Located on Corliss Street in Providence, the center's team is highly experienced treating patients struggling with substance use. From prescribing physicians and psychologist services, to a program manager, care coordinator and recovery coach, the staff takes a coordinated approach to care. Along with medication-assisted recovery utilizing Suboxone, a low risk medication that's an effective medically-supervised method for potentially weaning off opioids, the center offers comprehensive education and support.

“There is an incredible need to provide comprehensive treatment...Rhode Island Hospital and Lifespan have begun to create a model for addiction recovery medical centers across our country.”

— Diana Oehrli

“This is an evidence-based, multidisciplinary recovery program that regards opioid abuse as a chronic medical illness,” says Richard J. Goldberg, MD, MS, Lifespan Senior Vice President of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health. “We know that if you offer psychological therapies in addition to medication, more patients have a better outcome.” Further bolstering its services, Rhode Island Hospital recently received a generous \$184,000 gift from the Gruben Charitable Foundation to fund the center's Family Education and Support Program. The foundation's trustee and executive director, Diana Oehrli, is the daughter of Elizabeth “Lisette” Prince of Newport, who together with her children, including sons Guillaume and Regis de Ramel, established The Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute with a transformational gift from The Frederick Henry Prince 1932 Trust.



“My family's historical philanthropy has always centered on health, so focusing on addiction keeps with that tradition,” says Diana. “Addiction is a painful, chronic disease and I truly believe educating the family is key to helping people get better and halting addiction's spread to future generations.”

Developed specifically for family and friends of individuals struggling with opioid use disorder, the Family Education and Support Program employs a dual-pronged approach. Patients and their loved ones together attend a weekly group session, learning about addiction, recovery, treatment, and interpersonal dynamics. Separately, family and friends are also provided a group forum to share their experiences and the challenges of supporting someone in recovery.

“Family and friends play critical roles in helping individuals with substance use issues enter and remain in treatment—our goal is to empower them in a way that makes a positive impact on the long-term recovery of their loved one,” said Kirsten Langdon, PhD, a clinical psychologist and Director of Behavioral Therapy at the Lifespan Recovery Center. “We could not be more grateful to Diana for her extraordinary generosity and her commitment to this community health crisis.”

Adds Diana, “There is an incredible need to provide comprehensive treatment, and I believe Rhode Island Hospital and Lifespan have begun to create a model for addiction recovery medical centers across our country.”

In Gratitude

Dear Lifespan,

In late 2016, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. I was referred to Drs. Anthony Mega, Thomas Dipetrillo and Joseph Renzulli, who treated me for over one year with chemo, surgery, and radiation. I have friends and family, some of whom are physicians...I thank God that I was provided such quality treatment over numerous days without even a minor problem by this star team. I did not know of the prevalence of this disease but, with such skilled physicians and staff, there is a well-founded current treatment protocol and hope for future advances.

Thank all of you for being there for my family and myself,

Edward Molloy
Wakefield, RI



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Philanthropy is essential to sustaining every successful academic medical center. It is because of the generosity and kindness of its supporters that Rhode Island Hospital continues to thrive and grow while meeting the needs of our community since 1863.

The 1863 Society celebrates donors who have made an annual commitment of \$250 or more to our hospital's Fund for Excellence. The fund supports our areas of greatest need and our lifesaving work, while investing in the future of medicine, research, and medical education across southeastern New England. With your generosity, we can continue to provide the most advanced and superb care right here in Rhode Island.

To learn more about The 1863 Society, including giving levels and benefits, please visit giving.lifespan.org/1863-Society.



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