

See You in Fremont!

Dr. Gloria C. Duffy, President and CEO

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, just about every time I've heard about someone having joint surgery and have asked them where they had it done, the answer has been not at Stanford, not at UCSF, but "in Fremont." When I think of Fremont, I think of BART's southern terminus, of a few tech companies, of Little Kabul, and of a history of assembly line manufacturing, including the plant where the first Apple Mac was produced and the GM-Toyota NUMMI plant now reconfigured as Tesla Motors.

Not having regarded Fremont as a hotbed of medical activity, I inquired a bit further and was told that my friends were having hip and knee replacements at Washington Hospital in Fremont, done by a Dr. John Dearborn or his associate Dr. Sah.

Dr. Dearborn, who I will proudly say is a graduate of Acalanes High School in Lafayette, also my alma mater (we probably took the same biology and physiology classes, with slightly different results for the two of us), developed a new minimally invasive procedure for joint replacements. His process has people up and walking quickly, with high success rates and little pain. So patients have flocked to him by the thousands. The first of my friends who told me about his hip replacement with Dr. Dearborn was from Carmel, and patients come from all over the Western United States.

The medical hub in Fremont is now much more robust than just Washington Hospital itself, as I now know up-close and personally. I awakened one day in December to find my right knee, without warning, swollen to twice its normal size. A torn ligament from a fall 22 years ago and the ensuing life of many active sports, had finally caught up with me. After exams identified a torn meniscus and worn cartilage, I met in late January with Dr. King, an orthopedic surgeon at Palo Alto Medical Foundation, and was scheduled for arthroscopic surgery the next day. In Fremont.

A dozen out-patient surgical facilities have sprung up around Washington Hospital, several for joint repair. The proximity to the hospital and its staff means that any patient who has trouble during out-patient surgery can quickly be moved over to the hospital. And the same process for efficiency and success Dr. Dearborn has adopted is being used to improve the process for outpatient surgeries.

Dr. King operated on me in late January at one of these ambulatory surgery venues, the Fremont Surgery Center. The operation I experienced at the Surgery Center was quite amazing. Following the process developed for maximum efficiency and lower expense by Dr. Dearborn, hospital beds were lined up in two rows down a long room, each separated by a curtain from one another. At least 20 patients were prepped as though on an assembly line, though it was at the same time excellent and personal care. The nursing staff came by, the anesthesiologist stopped in, Dr. King came by and we co-signed the knee that was to be operated on, my family

came in to wish me well, and the IV was started.

Forty-five minutes after they wheeled me into surgery, I was done and the next patient was on their way in. Dr. Dearborn and Dr. Sah each do a number of joint replacements per day, two days per week, one after the other. The ambulatory surgery center follows the same routine, where Dr. King and his colleagues operate on one patient after another, from morning until night, on surgery days. One joke-cracking friend of mine refers to it as "in-and-out burger."

While the outpatient walks out of the surgery center shortly after surgery, part of the process is to have an in-office visit with the surgeon the morning after surgery. This wise precaution ensures that no problematic after-effects go undetected or unaddressed.

After TESLA and the Fremont School District, which are tied for being the city's largest employer, Washington Hospital



Photo courtesy of Gloria Duffy

Fremont is once again the assembly line capital of the Bay Area, but this time for joint surgeries.

is now the second-largest employer in Fremont, with more than 1,800 staff. The nearby out-patient surgery clinics, testing labs and the other associated medical facilities surely add hundreds more. Unemployment in Fremont, at 9 percent in 2010, is now at 3.5 percent.

The city of Fremont has facilitated development overall. Judging from the current edition of the city's economic development newsletter, "Bringing the Fremont Vision to Life," which has no discussion of medical facility development, the centralization of joint remediation in Fremont has happened almost organically, with the success and needs for associated services of one facility leading to the establishment of others.

In essence, Fremont is once again the assembly line capital of the Bay Area, but this time for joint surgeries. And I have the refurbished knee to prove it!