

## Kitchener man walks again after back surgery in India

'Still in a state of shock'

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KITCHENER (Apr 19, 2007)

For three years, Jeff Clarke was in a chronic state of pain.

The 34-year-old Kitchener man could stand for only 10 minutes at a time, sit for about 20 and then lie down again.

The back pain, diagnosed as degenerative disc disease, travelled through his legs and often he buckled over as he tried to stand. He used two canes and a walker to get around.

In a few years, Clarke was destined for a wheelchair.

Then one night last November as he was watching TV, he saw a commercial about a Canadian company offering surgery in India.

Clarke called the Vancouver-based business and within two days was sending his folder of medical information to the surgeon in Chennai, India.

"All of a sudden there was hope, valid hope I could grasp," he said.

On Jan. 28, Clark had two titanium rods placed in his lower back, two reconstructed discs made of high-density plastic inserted, as well as screws hold the discs together, all thanks to an Indian doctor.

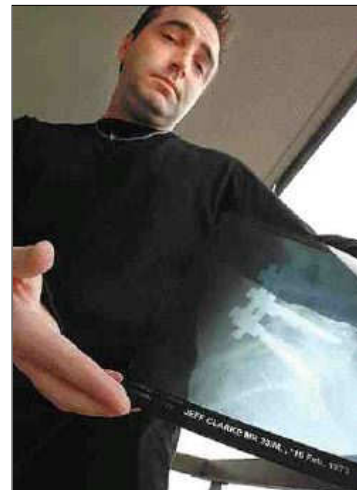
Today, Clarke walks without a cane or walker. Smiles more and enjoys simple things, he says.

"I'm still in state of shock two months later," he said.

Yasmeen Sayeed, president and chief executive officer of Surgical Tourism Canada Inc., said her company is determined to offer Canadian residents an alternative to wait lists.

Sayeed said interest in surgery abroad is ballooning. Last year, the company had 60 Canadian patients, 30 of them having major surgery such as hip, knees, spine and heart procedures.

Since January, it has conducted 20 surgeries.



ANDREW BERGLAND, RECORD STAFF  
After waiting a year to be treated for a degenerative disease in Canada, Jeff Clarke travelled to India for treatment through an organization called Surgical Tourism. Clarke is now able to walk without the aid of canes or a walker. He's holding an X-ray showing rods in his back.

Patients must pay for their surgery. In Clarke's case, however, Surgical Tourism paid the \$15,000 cost. Sayeed said her company felt sorry for Clarke because he could not afford the cost of the procedure.

Sayeed said the private health care system in India is advanced and the doctors are trained in the United States or the United Kingdom. It's also cheaper to do the same procedure there, she said.

Jeff Rohrer, spokesperson for the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care, said the government is aware of private companies offering surgeries abroad.

"Our focus is on improving our own medical system and reducing wait times," he said. Rohrer would not comment on Clarke's case.

Clarke's father, Gary, who lives in Sarnia, accompanied Clarke to India, paying his own travel expenses.

Clarke said he's so encouraged by his son's progress that he would recommend others do the same.

"He went from a minus 10 to a plus 10," he said.

Clarke's back pain started when he was 15. As a teen and in his 20s, he worked heavy labour jobs and often pulled his back, lying at home for two weeks to recuperate.

Three years ago, while employed at Toyota as a painter, he quit because he couldn't handle working any longer.

"It was pain every day, all day," he said. "I used to have to wake up a few hours early just to get myself to work."

Clarke was also taking an "amazing" amount of painkillers including morphine and OxyContin.

Over the years, Clarke has seen numerous specialists and surgeons and was repeatedly told nothing could be done now, but surgery might be possible in 10 years.

Clarke was nervous about travelling to a foreign country where he thought the health-care system was not up to Canadian standards.

"Part of me was worried about going to India and getting cut up in a shack," he said.

It was a leap of faith Clarke has no regrets about.

A week after surgery, he was off all painkillers and hasn't popped a pill since.

Clarke said not only was surgery successful but the medical care included rehab at a five-star resort. A full recovery is expected to take a year, he said.

In a couple of years, he hopes to return to the outdoor activities he used to enjoy such as mountain biking, hiking and camping with his two young children.

"I'll be back in action," he said.

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courtesy of the Record.com

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**Information to the reader from Surgical Tourism Canada**

[www.surgicaltourism.ca](http://www.surgicaltourism.ca)

Below are pictures of the facility where Jeff was treated. The Apollo Hospitals, Chennai

The Surgeon was Dr. Sajan k Hegde, MS- Ortho, Fellow Spine Surgeon, France, Germany, Switzerland  
Consultant Spine surgeon Apollo Hospitals, Chennai



The Hospital  
[www.apollohospitals.com](http://www.apollohospitals.com)



The Room in which Jeff stayed  
[www.apollohospitals.com](http://www.apollohospitals.com)



The Operating Theatre  
[www.apollohospitals.com](http://www.apollohospitals.com)