

Kenai Spine

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Dog sled champion back on the trails after non-surgical treatment relieves neck pain symptoms

As an outdoorsman, commercial fisherman, and the 1984 Iditarod Champion, Dean enjoys an active lifestyle. Last fall, Dean's snowmobile got stuck in the ice while he was out for a ride. He was lifting the snowmobile when he felt a sharp shooting pain in his neck. Dean figured the pain would go away after some rest.

Unfortunately, instead of getting better, his neck pain worsened and was accompanied by stiffness and pain into his arm. Dean made an appointment with his general practitioner to see what the problem was. His doctor examined Dean and ordered diagnostic imaging. After reviewing the diagnostics, the doctor referred Dean to Dr. Craig Humphreys, a fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon at Kenai Spine in Soldotna.

Dean made an appointment with Kenai Spine and at his appointment, Dr. Humphreys ordered a CT Scan and MRI of Dean's cervical spine. The results revealed that Dean had a bone infection (or osteomyelitis) in his cervical spine at C5-C6. Osteomyelitis is an infection of the bone cells which can lead to infections in other parts of the body if not treated properly. Dean's infection was dangerously close to his spinal column and Dr. Humphreys understood the urgency of treating the infection quickly.

The orthopedic surgeon directed Dean to go to the hospital where blood tests and a bone biopsy were performed to help determine the antibiotic that would best treat the infection. Meanwhile, Dean's neck and arm pain was near unbearable, at a level 9 on a scale of 10. "When I learned how serious my condition was, I considered traveling to New York for treatment. Dr. Humphreys put me at ease that I could stay in the Kenai Peninsula, near my home, for treatment," Dean reflects.

While in the hospital, Dean was given the choice of staying two more months in the



Dean is thankful he could stay on the Kenai Peninsula, near his home, for treatment by Dr. Humphreys instead of traveling hundreds of miles for his care. After months of severe pain Dean (shown above with his sled dogs) is happy to be back to a more normal lifestyle. Dean is shown below with his sled.

hospital for continuing treatment, or having a PICC (peripherally inserted central catheter) line inserted. Dean chose the latter option and a PICC line was inserted in Dean's arm to begin aggressive antibiotic treatment of the osteomyelitis. It took some time to determine the optimal antibiotic and dosage necessary to treat the infection. Dean's condition would require several months of antibiotics, along with medication to manage his pain level to get the infection under control.

Ultimately, the aggressive non-surgical care for Dean's spinal infection treated the condition — and surgery was not necessary. "It's always been my treatment philosophy to hold spine surgery as the last treatment option to explore — after all non-surgical options have been exhausted," Dr. Humphreys explains.

The road to recovery was not easy for Dean though. "I'm thankful I felt the sharp pain

that day while out on my snowmobile. If my condition had gone untreated, the infection so close to my spinal column could have been fatal," Dean says.

Today, Dean is nearly pain free and continues to return to a more normal lifestyle. His blood count is good and his CT scans are clear. Dean has returned to some commercial fishing and is back to training with his sled dogs and 4-wheelers on the beaches of Cook Inlet, Alaska. "Soon the snow will arrive and we will do the 'real thing' (train the dogs with sleds)," Dean says. "Training and racing sled dogs can be quite rigorous and one can get bounced around a lot. Of course, I will be extra careful not to crash too many times!"



S. Craig Humphreys, M.D.

Fellowship-Trained Spine Surgeon, Board-Certified Orthopedic Surgeon

Dr. Craig Humphreys earned his undergraduate degree at The University of Notre Dame. After graduating from the University of Notre Dame, he attended Loyola Stritch School of Medicine where he received his medical degree. He then completed an Internship and Residency at Loyola University Medical Center while also volunteering time as an MD in other countries, including India, St. Lucia and Lithuania. Dr. Humphreys then completed a Fellowship in Orthopedic Spine Surgery at The Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. In 1996, he joined the Center for Sports Medicine and Orthopaedics in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he practiced for more than 15 years with a spine specialized practice attracting complex spine patients from across Tennessee and northern Georgia. Dr. Humphreys' practice philosophy is to explore and exhaust all non-surgical options in advance of the patient considering spine surgery. This includes the use of spine-specialized therapy and injections that can relieve pain symptoms. Kenai Spine includes spine-specialized physical therapy to complement and augment his spine surgery expertise. Dr. Humphreys is glad to be a part of the Alaska medical community, and welcomes other physicians to contact him directly.

