

PARATHYROID SURGERY

A World of Difference

Xuemei “Mei” Fan traveled 8,000 miles from Guangdong, China to New Jersey in late January – her first trip to the United States – in search of relief for a deteriorating condition that left her with no energy and in constant pain.



Shown: Huizhou Fan, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacology, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School arranged for his sister, Xuemei Fan, who lives in China, to come to Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital for treatment of hyperparathyroidism. Following surgery, Ms. Fan has returned to China to be with her grandchild and Dr. Fan regularly communicates with her via Skype to make sure she's still feeling well.

Three weeks later, Ms. Fan, 60, was discharged from Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJ) and returned home feeling great and with just enough time to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

Two years ago, Ms. Fan started to feel shoulder, knee and other joint pain, she said. "Then there was heartburn and fatigue," she recalled. "A routine check-up test found that I had hypercalcemia - too much calcium in my blood."

Too much calcium can weaken bones and commonly results from overactive parathyroid glands located on or near the thyroid. An ultrasound and nuclear scan showed nodules on her thyroid. Fan underwent surgery in China; part of her thyroid was removed. However, following surgery her calcium levels remained high, and a parathyroid hormone test revealed above-normal results.

Ms. Fan developed "sleepy eyes" and had increasing pain and difficulty walking. She started to feel depressed. The illness was taking a toll on her physically, impacting her ability to practice as an internal medicine physician and affecting precious playtime with her young granddaughter:

In the meantime, Huizhou Fan, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacology at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, was growing more and more concerned about his sister's declining health. "She told me she fell a couple of times, and

I thought 'This is no good. Her bones are getting weaker,'" he remembered. "If she breaks a bone after a fall, it won't heal."

Ms. Fan however, couldn't undergo a second surgery in China. Her brother suggested she visit RWJ for treatment.

Mr. Fan reached out to Xiangbing Wang, MD, PhD, Professor of Medicine at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. Dr. Wang's professional interests include thyroid and parathyroid disorders and he specializes in endocrinology. The two originally became friends back in college in China. Their subsequent graduate, post-graduate and career pursuits took them in different directions across the globe, but more than a decade ago, they reconnected as peers at the medical school.

When Ms. Fan arrived at RWJ, Dr. Wang prescribed another nuclear scan and ultrasound and determined that she had ectopic hyperparathyroidism. "Hers was a dangerous condition," he explained. "Such high calcium levels can result in kidney stones, osteoporosis, severe dehydration and confusion and may interfere with the heartbeat."

Dr. Wang shared the findings with Stanley Trooskin, MD, Professor and Chief, Division of General Surgery at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and RWJ's Chief of Surgical Services, and they recommended the removal of Ms. Fan's enlarged parathyroid

and remaining thyroid to treat her thyroid cancer.

"This was a complex procedure. It was a re-operation, and we had to find the offending parathyroid, which in her case was near the clavicle, and remove the remaining thyroid, which was encased in scar tissue," Dr. Trooskin explained. "At RWJ, we do 500 thyroid and parathyroid operations each year. With the latest technology, we precisely localized the offending, enlarged parathyroid gland and removed it utilizing a minimally invasive approach, which is especially important when there's a lot of scar tissue."

Dr. Trooskin performed the surgery at RWJ and just one week following the surgery, Ms. Fan exclaimed "I'm a different person from when I arrived."

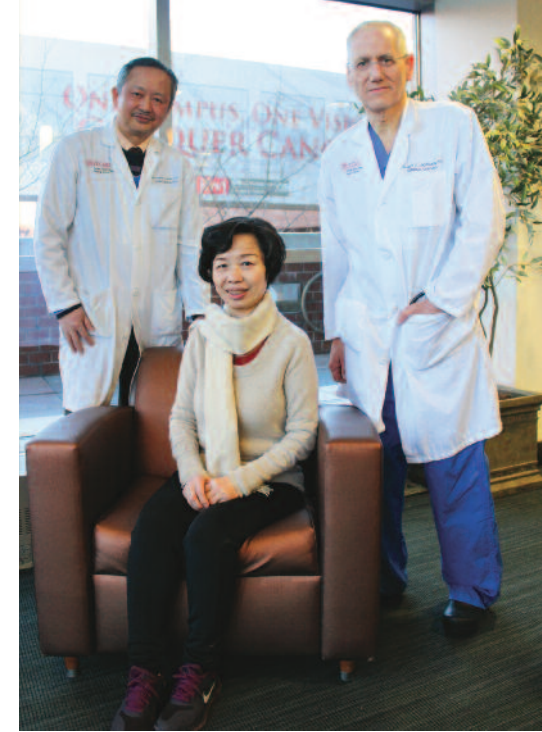
Her huge grin and sparkling eyes conveyed relief and pure joy. "I already feel more energetic," she added. "I can open my eyes! I can sleep better. I feel much better in general."

She will take medication until her bone density normalizes, Dr. Wang said, so her improvement would be gradual.

Ms. Fan said she was so profoundly appreciative of and impressed by the high quality of care she received and the teamwork at RWJ – citing Drs. Trooskin and Wang and the outpatient, radiology, operating room and Same Day Surgery staff in particular –

that she planned to discuss her experience with her colleagues in China with the hope that they too can learn from her journey.

Visit www.rwjuh.edu or call 1-888-MD-RWJUH.



Shown above: Xiangbing Wang, MD, PhD, (left) Professor of Medicine at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, and Stanley Trooskin, MD, (right) Professor and Chief, Division of General Surgery at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and RWJ's Chief of Surgical Services, treated Xuemei Fan, (center) a patient who traveled 8,000 miles from China to seek care at RWJ.