



Yoga instructor Veena Grover is grateful that her knee replacement has allowed her to get back to teaching.

Michael Neveuix Photography

Veena Gets a New Knee

A long-term fitness regimen and deep spiritual belief helped this 82-year-old recover quickly after surgery.



Dr. James Chen

When Veena Grover was working in her husband's medical practice and helping her children with their studies (two are now doctors and one is a lawyer), the pressure was getting to her. "I needed a change," she remembers, "so I started doing tae kwon do"—the Korean martial art—"and ultimately teaching it. I did that for 10 years and then I started getting into yoga."

Today the 82-year-old Dana Point resident teaches Ananda yoga three times a week at the Laguna Niguel Racquet Club. And she inspires her children and grandchildren—all seven of her grandchildren have black belts in martial arts and practice yoga. "I tell them all, 'Live humbly, live simply, let people judge you because of what you are doing. Don't brag,'" she says.

But Grover has certainly earned bragging rights in the past year. She is back to her regular teaching schedule after having a full knee replacement at Providence Mission Hospital. "My doctor had been telling me that I needed a knee replacement for the last 20 years," she says, "but I really love teaching yoga and didn't want to give it up. I used to joke that I wanted to die with my own knee."

Then the universe intervened. Grover was visiting San Diego and fell while walking on the beach. "The next day I was teaching my class and my knee just locked up," she remembers. After that, she had difficulty getting around. Her doctor ordered an MRI and found bone on bone in the knee joint. "He told me that I definitely needed surgery, and I got really down because I had heard bad things about knee replacements," she says. "I started deep breathing, and praying to God."

MEETING DR. CHEN

Grover had already visited several surgeons for her knee, but she wasn't convinced that she wanted any of them to operate on her until she met James Chen, MD. "I believe that everything happens for a reason," she says. "And after I met Dr. Chen I said to him, 'Maybe I was waiting for you to come into practice to have my knee replaced.'"

Grover has only kind words for the doctor and the people

working with him. "Dr. Chen and his staff were all so caring and supportive. I was nervous about surgery and they calmed me down." Grover had her surgery last October.

Grover and Dr. Chen, a fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon, opted for robotic surgery at Providence Mission Hospital. "I talk to people in detail about their expectations, the procedure, my approach and the implants," says Dr. Chen. "During Veena's surgery, the robot allowed me to customize the alignment so that she could have a quicker recovery and better knee flexion later. I wanted her to get back to her yoga."

Dr. Chen explains that this approach is called customized care pathways. "We tailor everything to the individual," he says. "Our goal is to keep patients healthy and happy. If you have end-stage arthritis, bone on bone, it's best not to wait too long to have surgery. It will keep you healthier in the long run by increasing joint strength and cardiovascular health."

To enhance communication, Dr. Chen provides patients with an AI virtual-care assistance app. "It lets us know if a person is dropping off their recovery curve by following them and asking about pain and activity," he says. According to Grover, the app really helped her by checking in every morning and making sure she was doing her exercises.

RETURNING TO TEACHING

"I couldn't do too much right away after my surgery," says Grover. "I did physical therapy twice a week and did a lot of deep breathing. But by the end of December I was ready to go back to work. Dr. Chen checked me out and said, 'Go back, but don't overdo it.'" She started teaching one class a week in January.

"Now I am 90% back to myself," says Grover. "I train with a private trainer and go for walks. And I am back to teaching three times a week. Healing happens when you are shown love and compassion, and that is what happened for me with Dr. Chen and Mission Hospital." ●



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