

New Hope For Shoulder Mobility and Pain Relief

University Orthopedics surgeons perform reverse total shoulder replacements at the Miriam and Rhode Island Hospitals.

Dr. Theodore Blaine of University Orthopedics recently performed a reverse total shoulder replacement at Miriam Hospital. This specialized surgery uses a unique shoulder implant, which reverses the position of the ball and socket.

The reverse shoulder implant allows the patient's deltoid muscle to do the work that can no longer be performed by the damaged rotator cuff to lift the arm. For some patients this means there is new hope for a substantial recovery of shoulder and arm mobility and relief from pain.

Dr. Blaine and Dr. Andrew Green of University Orthopedics are two of a small number of surgeons nationwide who are qualified to perform this cutting edge procedure.

Dr. Green has been performing this procedure at Rhode Island Hospital. Dr. Blaine, who joined the staff in 2007, had performed many of these procedures at his previous practice (Columbia Orthopedics and the Presbyterian Hospital in New York). They teach other physicians how to properly install the reverse shoulder prosthesis.

Prime candidates for total reverse shoulder surgery are patients who have a completely torn rotator cuff, severe arthritis, and/or a previous shoulder replacement that failed. For a majority of these patients, the reverse shoulder operation will restore function so the patient can raise the arm and use it once again and it minimizes or eliminates arthritic pain.

Dr. Blaine said the reverse total shoulder operation is not new. Doctors in Europe have been doing it since the 1980s, but the complication rate was high— up to 30%. Recent design improvements in the prosthesis led to FDA approval for use in the U.S. in 2004.

He said that the reverse total shoulder surgeries he and Dr. Green have performed have had complication rates of less than 10%. Surgeon experience with the procedure and careful screening of patients to eliminate those with a high potential risk of failure account for the low complication rates.

These are the kinds of patients that have been to other doctors and told there is nothing that can be done for them. Individuals need to know that this may not be true. There may be some new procedures and surgeons' experience in them that offer meaningful quality of life improvements," said Dr. Blaine.

"In addition," he said, "some people felt that they had to go to Boston or New York for this procedure. They don't have to do that. We can do this right here in Providence."

Drs. Blaine and Green are recognized experts in all types of shoulder replacements.