



A division of Crystal Clinic Orthopaedic Center

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CRYSTAL CLINIC PLASTIC SURGEONS PERFORM AREA'S FIRST FACIAL REANIMATION PROCEDURE
Microvascular surgery offers hope to patients with facial paralysis

Fairlawn, Ohio, Jan. 7, 2021 – Derek Cody, M.D., a Crystal Clinic plastic and reconstructive surgeon, has performed the area's first functional free-tissue transfer procedure to treat facial paralysis caused by damage to the nerves that control facial movement. This microvascular surgical technique offers hope to patients with facial nerve paralysis due to brain cancer or its treatment, or a viral illness such as Bell's palsy.

With this facial reanimation technique, muscle tissue from the inner thigh is transplanted to the face to restore movement, function and symmetry. The muscle tissue is placed under the skin of the cheek using the same type of well-hidden incisions used in a facelift. Over the next several months, as the transplanted tissue heals and nerve function is restored, patients have marked improvement in their ability to blink, chew, drink, speak and smile.

Dr. Cody's patient, Christine Bohatiuk of Akron, who underwent the six-hour facial reanimation procedure earlier this fall, had facial paralysis from a prior surgery to remove a brain tumor. Bohatiuk, a native of Bosnia who has been living in the U.S. for the last nine years, was treated for the brain tumor in her homeland 20 years ago.

"Facial paralysis can be associated with surgery or radiation to treat brain stem tumors that are near the facial nerve," Dr. Cody explained. "Along with the social stigma of facial paralysis, patients may also experience drooling, difficulty speaking or problems closing the eyes, which then reduces their ability to protect the eyes and can lead to dry eye and vision problems."

For Bohatiuk, the paralysis was severe. She had no feeling on the left side of her face and was unable to close her left eyelid. This led to persistent dry eye that put her at risk for losing her vision. After having unsuccessful facial reanimation surgery in Bosnia, she was reluctant to try again.

However, after researching more about Dr. Cody and then meeting him, she was confident he could help her.

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“Dr. Cody is not only a wonderful surgeon, he’s a wonderful human being,” she said. “Before the surgery, I was so unhappy about how I looked. Words cannot describe how grateful and happy I am. Dr. Cody gave me my life back.”

Almost immediately after the surgery, Bohatiuk regained feeling in her face, something she hadn’t experienced in 20 years. She’s now able to close her eyelid and no longer needs eyedrops to lubricate the eye. Every day since the surgery, as she has continued to heal, she sees ongoing improvement. She’s no longer self-conscious about her appearance and can smile without pain.

Dr. Cody has been performing facial reanimation for a decade. “Facial reanimation procedures are not widely available across the U.S., so it’s important for those living with facial paralysis to know we are here to help,” said Dr. Cody. “They don’t have to accept feeling self-conscious about their appearance or any of the physiological difficulties associated with loss of facial nerve function.”

To learn more, call Crystal Clinic Plastic Surgeons at 330-668-4065 or visit CrystalPlasticSurgeons.com.

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About Crystal Clinic Plastic Surgeons

Crystal Clinic Plastic Surgeons is a division of the nationally renowned Crystal Clinic Orthopaedic Center, a physician-owned hospital system. Crystal Clinic Plastic Surgeons is one of the largest plastic and reconstructive surgery groups in Northeast Ohio with five board-certified surgeons on staff and clinics in Barberton, Canton, Green, Hudson and Montrose. The group specializes in a wide range of procedures, including comprehensive care for complex reconstructions and treatment of soft tissue defects related to orthopaedic injuries. They provide the entire spectrum of plastic surgery, including breast reconstruction, skin cancer surgery, facial cosmetic surgery, post-weight-loss body contouring, rhinoplasty, as well as non-surgical, facial rejuvenation options. For more information, visit CrystalPlasticSurgeons.com.