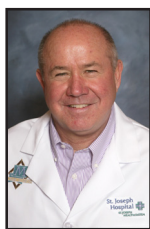


Chris Wills, MD Orthopedic Surgery

Why do you only take private pay and Medicare?

I believe that insurance companies are the closest thing we have to organized crime. They are corporations designed to make money, not help or care about people – they care about profits. Every time an insurance company cheated me I quit. That was seven or eight years ago, and I didn't go out of business. It's ironic that the insurance companies would threaten to take me out of their books, but five years after dropping them I was still fighting to get my name out of their books. I lost some patients, but was surprised by how few, and many of them came back. I think it's because I take a lot of time talking with my patients. I believe the most valuable thing we do is educate patients on their conditions. They're willing to pay for that.

I could do lot more total joint replacements but I don't want to be a production line. With 24 years in practice I've been there, done that and didn't enjoy it. Sitting around and getting to know my patients is a lot more fun. In some families I've treated five generations, and half the visit is catching up on the other family members!



And your professional affiliations?

I'm on the Board of Directors of the California Orthopaedic Association and Board of Councilors of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, the biggest orthopedic organization in the world. I'm going to Washington, D.C., at the end of April to talk to Congress. It's fun being involved with state and national issues, protecting what we can do for our patients, and being involved in the reform process from the inside. You hear so-called experts talk about the reform bill and it's clear they haven't read it. I read all 1,074 pages and what's often said amounts to hype and scare tactics. If I'd written the law I would have done so differently but on balance I think it's a good thing for the country and patients.

Didn't you have your own ortho issue last year?

I was leaving an orthopedic meeting in SJO's Northeast (Sr. Frances Dunn) Building when I fell down the stairs and tore all of my quadriceps off my knee cap. I was surrounded by colleagues when some nice fellow came running up and asked, "Can I help?" I told him, "No thanks, I think these 12 orthopedic surgeons can handle it." Looking at my knee I knew instantly what the problem was and what the future held for me

over the next week, month, six months and year. I had three surgeries by one of my partners, Dr. Paul Beck: first a repair, then one for infection and a third an arthroscopy on a meniscal tear. I found it interesting how little it hurt. I'm not a martyr, but never took a pain pill. It did slow me down, but now my knee works fine.

What does the future of orthopedics hold?

We are on the leading edge of a brave new world of treatment in orthopedics. Currently to replace cartilage – to treat arthritis - we have joint replacements with metal, ceramic and plastics. Genetic scientists have been able to replicate cartilage in mice. It's exciting to think that in the future, we won't be doing joint replacements; we'll be fixing femur fractures of 100 year olds out playing tackle football.

Dr. Chris Wills was the U.S. and British national champion in hang gliding in the 1970s. While a poor college student without the money to pay for an airplane, he built his own ultra light plane out of bamboo and plastic. From that hobby came Wills Wing based in Orange, the largest manufacturer of aircraft (hang gliders) in the world, of which Dr. Wills is chairman of the board. Some of his hang gliders are on display at the John Wayne Airport.

SJO physicians appearing "In the Trenches" are now posted online at www.sjo.org



A PUBLICATION FROM THE ST. JOSEPH HOSPITAL MEDICAL STAFF OFFICE



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