

Our Mission at Work!

Journey to a New Life: A story of triumph over pain and addiction

Andi-Lee Hokoana considers herself a double winner. On May 25, the 37-year-old Wai'anae mother was discharged from Castle Medical Center after complicated surgery to replace her severely damaged right hip. She also celebrated one year free from her addiction to pain medications.

At the age of 8, Andi-Lee suffered from blood poisoning that she said "ate up my whole hip." Surgeons at Shriners Hospital inserted rods and metal plates to repair the damage and strengthen her hip. But a later injury to her hip prevented complete fusion of the bone, which eventually grew over the hardware. "The hospital I was referred to didn't have the technology to repair my hip and could not help me," Andi-Lee recalls.

Over the next three decades, Andi-Lee's hip continued to worsen, causing extreme pain and disability, including a curved back and one leg that was three inches shorter than the other. "I went to plenty of doctors, but they all turned me away, saying it was too big of a surgery for them," she said.

"Because of the pain, I turned to pain medicines and became a drug addict."

A fateful meeting

Eventually, Andi-Lee gave up all hope of fixing her hip, but she decided to get help for her drug problem. She entered a "clean and sober" house, where she met a woman who led the Women in Recovery group. She told Andi-Lee that she needed to set three goals: get her hip fixed, apply for Social Security, and find her own housing. "I told her I couldn't find a surgeon to repair my hip," Andi-Lee said.

Coincidentally, the group leader was a good friend of orthopedic surgeon Linda] Rasmussen, M.D., who performs surgery at Castle's Joint Care Center. Before Andi-Lee's appointment, Dr. Rasmussen showed Andi-Lee's hip X-rays to her colleagues at Castle. "Some of my buddies at the Mayo Clinic said it would be a huge challenge," Rasmussen said. But Andi-Lee lacked the money to buy a ticket to the mainland.

Dr. Rasmussen, who last year performed more than 300 total joint replacements, reassured Andi-Lee. "It's a big operation, but I think I can fix it." Andi-Lee was then admitted to Castle, where she was unable to walk even from her bed to the nurses' station a few feet away.

Complex surgery

During surgery, Dr. Rasmussen was able to remove the old hardware in Andi-Lee's hip, but it was an extremely complicated procedure because her acetabulum was missing. "We went slowly and worked under X-rays to create a new joint," said Dr. Rasmussen.



A whole new body

Andi-Lee is now back at the clean and sober house. For the first time in 30 years, she can bend her leg, her back is not crooked, and she is nearly pain free. She uses a walker and will participate in physical therapy to relearn how to walk. Dr. Rasmussen was able to lengthen her right leg two inches. "The women here help me take a bath, go to the toilet, put on my clothes, and give me my medicine," said Andi-Lee, who eagerly looks forward to an active life with her three teenaged sons and her 2-year-old granddaughter.

"Now she has a whole new body," says Dr. Rasmussen. "She is such a nice person, and she never would have become a drug addict if she didn't have so much joint degeneration and hip pain. She would have had to go to the Mayo Clinic for this difficult operation, but we were able to do it here at Castle."

"I am so grateful to Dr. Rasmussen because she didn't turn me away," said Andi-Lee. "She knew how much pain I was in, and I truly believed she could help me. She saved my life."