

Pain Free After a Debilitating Decade

Innovative Balloon Implant Brings Torn Rotator Cuff Relief

Eugenia (Gina) Orozco served as a frontline hospital hero for nearly 30 years in her role as an environmental services aide at Washington Health. She was a valued employee and liked her job cleaning and disinfecting patient rooms, but injury struck one day in 2009. Gina felt and heard a “pop” in her shoulder while lifting a bag of linen. After two unsuccessful surgeries, premature retirement, and 10 years of debilitating pain, Gina finally found relief for her irreparable torn rotator cuff. Here is her story.

“Following my injury, I had surgery to repair my shoulder, but immediately I knew something was not right,” recalled Gina. “Then in 2015 I had another surgery and again, I knew it did not work. Nothing I tried helped; in fact, physical therapy made the pain worse and I would leave in tears. That was the start of a difficult, painful 10 years of my life.”

It is tough to hear Gina talk about that decade of her life. She could not sleep on her left side because of the pain and was not able to blow dry her hair or grab a coffee mug from up in the cupboard. Gina loves walking, but recalls keeping her left hand in her pocket instead of letting it swing freely like her right arm – the movement was just too excruciating. In fact, she says she learned to work with her upper left arm held firmly to her side. Finally, she had to give up her job and retire when the work became too difficult.

The Right Surgeon and Solution

Gina’s journey to relief started in an unexpected way – with an X-ray of her lungs to diagnose a lingering cough. The imaging showed her lungs were clear, but the pulmonologist spotted a lesion in her left shoulder. A PET scan further confirmed the lesion was suspicious, so Gina was referred to an orthopedic oncologist for a bone cancer biopsy. But Gina did not want to go. She was apprehensive about returning to an orthopedist because of her two previous failed surgeries. Besides, she knew in her heart she did not have cancer. She was sure the lesion had something to do with her previous torn rotator cuff surgery.

In early 2025 Gina visited orthopedic surgeon John Costouros, MD, FACS, FAAOS, with Washington Health’s Institute for Joint Restoration and Research, for an evaluation. Dr. Costouros is one of the world’s foremost experts in the comprehensive treatment of shoulder disorders.

“Dr. Costouros told me the lesion and pain in my shoulder was due to bone-on-bone grinding as a result of failed internal stitches from my last shoulder surgery,” Gina said. “I always knew something was seriously wrong with my shoulder, even though I was informed back in 2015 that it was fine. Dr. Costouros told me he would take care of me, and sure enough, he gave me a second chance at life.”

On February 25, 2025, Dr. Costouros performed an arthroscopic procedure,



Back to her regular activities, Gina Orozco is happy to live pain free.

cleaning out the extensive scar tissue and inserting a subacromial balloon spacer into Gina’s shoulder. This biodegradable, saline-filled balloon enables smooth movement of the humeral head against the shoulder blade. Recently FDA approved for massive irreparable rotator cuff tears, the balloon offers a faster return to daily activities (approximately four weeks), and earlier improvement in range of motion compared to traditional, more invasive surgeries. Dr. Costouros was a first adopter of the implant in the U.S. and has performed approximately 100 of these minimally invasive procedures.

Gina is thrilled she has regained full motion of her shoulder and says her life

has changed for the better one year post surgery. Today she enjoys gardening and of course walking – with both arms swinging naturally and pain free!

This is the final article in a two-part series on the subacromial balloon spacer for treatment of massive irreparable torn rotator cuffs. To read more about this exciting new solution, see the April 28 edition of the Tri-City Voice at tricityvoice.com. For more information about Dr. Costouros and the Institute for Joint Restoration and Research, visit WashingtonHealth.com/IJRR.

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