

## A Member's BridgeHealth Experience

Having been a Teamster member for 40 years I've seen a lot of changes in our healthcare. I would like to share my recent BridgeHealth Medical experience. This new option is one I would highly recommend to any Teamster looking at major surgery.

I needed a hip replacement and started looking in Alaska. I found a highly recommended surgeon in Anchorage who I was planning to use until I began looking into the advantages of Teamster's BridgeHealth option. Medical costs in Alaska are very high and choices are limited compared to other places. A recent excellent article, in *The Alaska Business Monthly* (December 2014), referred to the healthcare pricing process in Alaska as "the wild west of healthcare systems."

There is a common misunderstanding regarding our Teamster medical insurance—that our medical expenses are paid by big insurance companies. We are self-insured which means all of our medical costs come right out of our own pool of hourly contributions so any cost savings will help to keep our medical fund strong.

BridgeHealth contracts with self-insured groups such as ours to find affordable and top-quality surgeries around the country. My misconception was that they would find some cheap place with mediocre doctors to do the work. Instead, I received expert, advanced care at a top-rated surgical facility.

Using the Teamsters BridgeHealth option, our deductible and out of pocket maximum are waived, so the member pays nothing at all out of pocket for the entire surgery process. Travel and hotel for the member and a companion are paid for, and the member receives \$100 per day for food and incidental expenses. Also included in our services was daily post-surgical physical therapy right at our hotel. And still, using this option saved our union significant funds!

BridgeHealth assigned a great care coordinator who answered my questions, and provided a list of doctors and facilities to consider I said, "I want to go south and sunny with a good doctor." Their website had a very extensive list of all places around the country with all the ratings. They use a national rating database website: CareChex, and only contract with the top-tier CareChex rated providers they also do all reservations, scheduling, etc.

I narrowed my search to a center in Newport Beach, California. The surgeon, Dr. James Caillouette and the facility were rated as excellent, and in fact every aspect of my experience with them was the best! I was accepted for surgery there and got a call from Dr. Caillouette, who said he did a (very advanced) minimally invasive, muscle sparing posterior hip approach. After reading his website, I found that he does 500 joint replacements and 150 arthroscopic surgeries a year. Take a look at his website to see all his honors and accolades at [hipkneearthritis.com](http://hipkneearthritis.com).

Also, in today's confusing and mysterious healthcare cost scene the website for his surgical center, The Orthopedic Surgery Center of Orange County ([oscoc.com](http://oscoc.com)), amazingly, lists the all-inclusive dollar price for each surgery!

The surgery went great and I was discharged within 23 hours and walking. A week later, at the post-op appointment, I walked out of his office and forgot my cane! Surprising to say about a major surgery it was a wonderful experience and the +70° weather and sun were a nice bonus in January.

This article was written by Teamster Roger Watney.