

A Doctor Who Has Your Back

David S. Rosenblum, MD

Gaylord Specialty Healthcare
Wallingford

Spinal-cord injury specialist David Rosenblum stops at nothing to improve the lives of his patients

Pinned to the bulletin board in the Niantic nursing home room where Cynthia Fiora lives is a photograph of a man who has played a central role in her life.

"If I point to the picture or ask Cynthia, 'Who is that guy at Gaylord we love so much?' she can't speak but she will smile," says Cynthia's mother, Gloria Litsky.

The "guy" is David S. Rosenblum, MD, medical director of physical medicine and rehabilitation at Gaylord Specialty Healthcare in Wallingford, and director of its spinal-cord injury program. He's a physiatrist, or medical doctor specializing in physical medicine, rehabilitation medicine and spinal-cord injury medicine.

Fiora, 62, has multiple sclerosis. She met Rosenblum more than two decades ago, when she was a Gaylord outpatient. Over the years he has helped her — and countless others.

Rosenblum, 52, was an early advocate for the baclofen pump, an implanted device used to deliver medicine to relieve spasticity.

"Cynthia got her first baclofen pump in 2000 to help keep her legs from becoming stiff," Litsky says.

In 2006 Gaylord, in collaboration with Boston (University) Medical Center, affiliated with the New England Regional Spinal Cord Center, one of 14 model spinal-cord systems in the U.S. Its research is funded by the federal government. The achievement was the culmination of years of effort by Rosenblum.

His pursuit of excellence began early.

While growing up in Woodstock, N.Y., Rosenblum had twin passions: medicine and music. His family physician, a family friend, often took him on rounds at a local community hospital. The budding doctor also devoted himself to the flute, which he began playing as a child.

When considering colleges, Rosenblum chose the University of

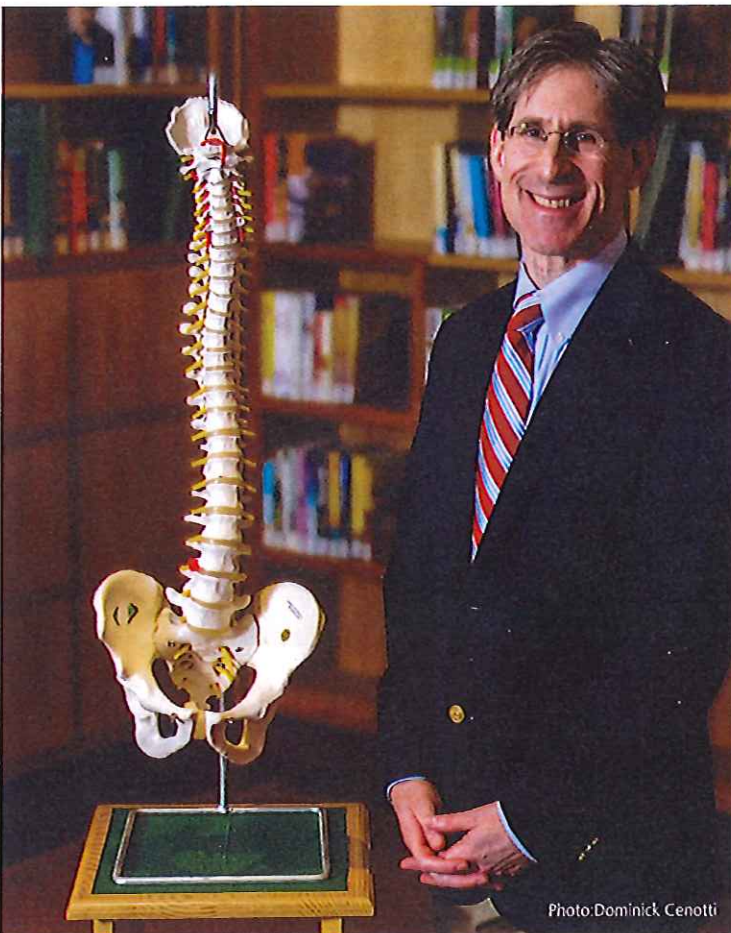


Photo: Dominick Cenotti

Albany (N.Y.) as much for its music program as its science curriculum.

"I wanted to be able to take lessons and play in chamber ensembles," he recalls. "Then [following graduation] I went to medical school at the University of Buffalo, and there wasn't time for music."

A sub-internship in rehabilitation during his final year of medical school set the stage for Rosenblum's career. "That was it," he says. "I never looked back."

After completing med school in 1987, Rosenblum did an internship in internal medicine at Millard Fillmore Hospital in Buffalo, N.Y. and a residency in physical medicine and rehabilitation at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City.

He began working at Gaylord in the early 1990s, where he assumed a proactive approach to finding the best care for his patients.

"As soon as the baclofen pump was approved [in 1994 by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration], I went to Boston and spent a lot of time with one of the lead investigators," says Rosenblum. "Gaylord was one of the first centers to offer it."

Rosenblum also was an early adopter of using botulinum toxin (trade name Botox) to treat spasticity.

One of the latest innovations Gaylord has helped to pioneer is the Ekso Bionic Exoskeleton, a robotic suit enabling individuals confined to wheelchairs to stand and learn to walk.

In 2012, Gaylord became one of 20 facilities in the world where patients can use the exoskeleton.

Research is one of Rosenblum's priorities.

"He been heading up our effort to try to make sure that patient care is the latest and the best," explains Alan Jette, MD, director of the New England Regional Spinal Cord Center. Rosenblum is a co-principal investigator with the center.

As director the Health & Disability Research Institute at the Boston University School of Public Health, Jette oversees a research program that spans nearly three decades.

"We've looked at things like pressure ulcers and ways to reduce depression," Jette says. "Now we're focused on advocacy, using a computer-based program to help people become stronger advocates with their primary care doctors."

The research is federally funded in five-year cycles.

During Gaylord's first grant cycle, Rosenblum explains, "We worked to create a reliable and valuable measurement tool for spinal-cord injury that may be better than the functional independence measure [on disability and rehabilitation outcomes], which was never designed for use with spinal cord injury. Now in our second cycle, we're working on computer technology allowing the choice of questions to be narrowed."

Jette says he has "really enjoyed collaborating with Dr. Rosenblum" since 2006.

"His compassion as a physician and dedication to the patients is very genuine," Jette says, "and he's the kind of person I'd like to work with if I had a spinal-cord injury."

Brian Marshall is glad he did.

"His dedication is just unbelievable," says Marshall, who first met Rosenblum in the intensive care unit at Yale-New Haven Hospital last September, following surgery for an accident that left him paralyzed from the chest down. "I was in a coma for

most of two weeks but I did know that he was going to be my physician."

Marshall was transferred to Gaylord on October 1, 2013. "As I started to gain consciousness and cognitive abilities, that's when I realized that Dr. Rosenblum is truly one of a kind," he says. "He answered all my questions, and he would check on me in the morning, and in the evening, depending on what issues arose."

Even more important to the patient was Rosenblum's demeanor. "He smiles," Marshall says. "He's confident. He exudes enthusiasm, which sets the tone for his whole team."

That enthusiasm was contagious.

"I immediately made the decision I was going to work as hard as I can," says the 50-year-old Marshall, a former sales specialist for Hesco, a Rocky Hill-headquartered industrial-automation solution provider. "I'm paralyzed, but I'm adapting to my spinal-cord injury.

"It's a case of just moving forward. When I woke up and found out my back was broken, I figured I would be in on a ventilator and in rehab for a year," Marshall adds. Instead, he left Gaylord shortly before Thanksgiving. He was strong enough to sit up and

move around in a wheelchair. He now lives with his mother in Massachusetts.

"I can't believe how much better and stronger I got so quickly, thanks to PT [physical therapy] and OT [occupational therapy]," Marshall says. "Dr. Rosenblum got me going as quickly as I could, and I would not be where I am without his care."

Litsky characterizes Rosenblum as "very remarkable" in the way he listens to patients, looks at them and talks to them "in this quiet voice.

"After all these years we've never lost touch," she says. "He's such a gem, and the people who have him are so fortunate."

Looking ahead, Rosenblum envisions further improvements on an ambulatory system for patients with spinal-cord injuries, including home units within the next five years.

"Then there's search for the cure," he says. "There's so much going on with research in stem cells and chemicals to inhibit factors that inhibit the growth of nerves. There really isn't anything practical now, but perhaps in the next decade we'll be able to capitalize on the fruits of all that research."

— Karen Singer

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