

Susan Swanson's determination to resume activities after a patella fracture drives need for a new surgical repair procedure

Returning home after a vacation is never fun. For Susan Swanson, though, leaving her Michigan vacation with friends changed the next year of her life. Leaving the hotel lobby, Swanson slipped on the hotel atrium floor and crumpled to the ground with her left leg bent backwards at 180 degrees. From the immediate and excruciating pain, Swanson knew she had severely injured her left knee. Trying not to faint, she took stock of herself, straightened her leg with great difficulty and pain and discovered she was able to stick her finger into the space where her patella was supposed to be.



Unable to stand on her own despite the make-shift brace she crafted from hotel towels, Swanson realized she was not going to be able to drive home to Chicago without medical treatment. Her ambulance ride to the closest emergency room was 26 miles away.

“X-rays taken in the emergency room clearly showed my fractured patella,” Swanson explained. “The doctors wanted to admit me, but I told them I was going home to be near family and my physicians. I knew I needed to be seen by a knee specialist, so they put me in a soft brace and gave me a bag of ice,” she quipped. According to Swanson, the brace was too big and did not immobilize her knee sufficiently which made standing and walking virtually impossible. The ligaments were unable to stabilize her knee. Sitting was okay, so a determined Swanson drove the two and one-half hours to Chicago.

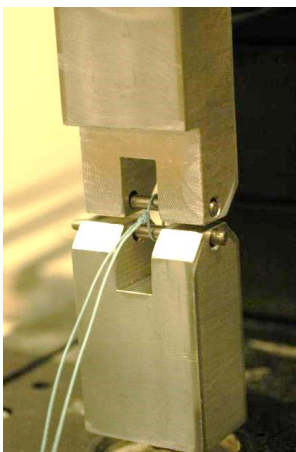
The next morning, Swanson phoned Hinsdale Orthopaedics for an appointment. Dr. Steven Chudik repaired the labrum in her left shoulder a year earlier, so she was excited to learn he could see her later that morning since he also is a knee specialist. “He told me I was going to need surgery after examining my knee and looking at the emergency room X-rays,” Swanson said. “But it was his reaction to my question about whether I could take a trip to Bryce Canyon about two months away that said it all. He looked at his assistant and back at me and replied, ‘I don’t think so.’ We then discussed my options,” she laughed.

As Dr. Chudik reviewed her options, Swanson said she made it very clear she didn’t care how big of a scar he had to make, she just wanted to make sure she was going to be able to resume her active life that includes working out five days a week, hiking, gardening, golfing and working full-time. “Dr. Chudik promised he would do everything possible to make that happen. He told

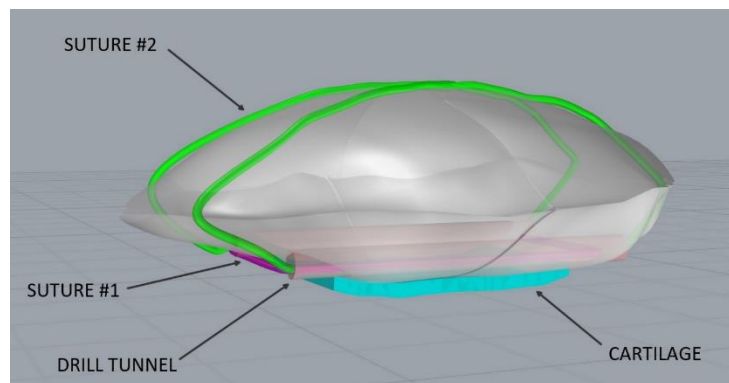
me a patella fracture is serious because it not only affects the ability to straighten the leg and stand, but also involves the knee joint surface, the quadricep muscle and cartilage of the patella,” Swanson explained.

“Swanson’s X-rays revealed she had a severe displaced (separated) comminuted (multiple fragments) patella fracture that often requires a lot of metal hardware (screws, wires, plates) to repair the injury,” Dr. Chudik said. “Unfortunately, the hardware often causes considerable irritation and more surgery to remove after the fracture heals,” he added.

Because of the severity of the fracture and Swanson’s goals to return to an active lifestyle, Dr. Chudik knew he had to do something different—something better than the ‘standard of care’ for her or she would be limited and disappointed.



Dr. Chudik’s laboratory testing of special, ultra-high strength suture.



Three-D schematic of Dr. Chudik’s new suture fixation technique to repair patella fractures.

“So instead of hardware, I used special ultra-high strength suture that I have been studying in the lab and developed a new technique to repair her patella fracture. This procedure completely eliminates the irritation, pain, scarring, limited function and additional surgery associated with typical hardware,” he detailed.

Dr. Chudik’s new technique utilized the dense subchondral bone (bone just below the cartilage) to pass the sutures through to piece the fracture back together and perfectly align the broken patella cartilage in her knee joint.

Five days after her surgery, Swanson was back working at her desk job in industrial sales, navigating on crutches and sporting a new, supportive brace from Dr. Chudik. “Fortunately, I was able to sit with my leg elevated at work and ice it according to Dr. Chudik’s post-operative instructions,” Swanson said.

According to Swanson, physical therapy was difficult and painful. “My therapist really had to work my patella and quad muscle to keep them from getting stiff and to ensure I got my full range of motion back because I couldn’t go to the gym,” she explained. “It took about four months before I was able to even get back on a treadmill,” she added.



While still in physical therapy, a determined Swanson traveled to visit her son in Salt Lake City. “We did a lot of walking and I even climbed a long staircase in Park City without my brace,” she said with great pride and sense of accomplishment.

Upon completing physical therapy, Swanson resumed daily workouts varying the equipment and exercises to ensure a thorough workout—especially for her legs. “I am a very active and I need my knee back,” the determined Swanson said.

A breast cancer survivor of 13 years, Swanson is resolute about not sitting around and feeling sorry for herself that she fractured her patella. “I believe things happen for a reason and people come into your life for a reason, too, like my oncologist who only was in Chicago for one year, like Dr. Chudik who previously repaired my shoulder, and like my physical therapist who rehabbed my shoulder and most recently my knee before moving out of state,” she shared. “I am thrilled Dr Chudik created a new procedure as a result of my injury that also will benefit other patella trauma patients. I have been told by others who are struggling with weight loss, a regular exercise routine, or aches and pains that they are inspired by my determination and recovery,” Swanson added. Life is Good! God works in His way. Dr. Chudik is amazing and I am grateful that he believed in me.

Sitting around she’s not. Swanson made plans to hike the Smokey Mountains just ten months post-operatively with a photography group. She also participated in a 5K walk / run race less than four months out of physical therapy. She finished the 5K walk/ run in 49 min. “I still have a little pain and stiffness but, I know it takes time to fully recover,” Swanson acknowledged. “But, I’m eager to get back to where I was before the fall and so very grateful to Dr. Chudik for working with me on my mobility goals by performing his new surgical procedure He listened to my needs and he believed in my determination to recover. That says it all,” she added

