

HEALTH News & Notes

SURGERY HELPS TEEN LOOK FORWARD TO LIFE AHEAD

(NAPSA)—Chatting with 15-year-old Svetlana, you would never know that her spine has been completely rebuilt.

She sits straight up, cross-legged on her bed in the home of her St. Louis host family, surrounded by stuffed animals, Britney Spears tapes and photographs of her family and friends in Moscow, as she self-consciously tucks her hair behind her ears.

Svetlana is a typical teenager, but hers is not a typical story. Severe scoliosis brought her and her mother, Natalia, half a world away from Moscow to the St. Louis Shriners Hospital for Children.

Natalia first noticed her daughter's spine curvature at age 5. By the time "Lana," as she is called, was seven, her scoliosis had progressed so rapidly that she could no longer sit comfortably at a school desk.

Her parents enrolled her in a school for children with physical disabilities, where she lived five days a week for the next seven years.

Her treatment consisted of a brace, limited exercise, and a special bed. Lana grew up with an increasingly curved spine and intense pain, severely limiting her ability to walk and breathe.

About a year ago, Lana and her mother learned about Shriners Hospitals. They arrived at the St. Louis Hospital in Sept. 2001, and their first meeting with Lawrence Lenke, M.D., spine surgery chief, was an eye-opener.

They learned that her spine was curved 149 degrees. The physicians in Moscow had been telling the family for years that the curve was only 55 degrees. Lenke indicated that Lana would have had a difficult time reaching her 30th birthday had she gone



Dr. Lawrence Lenke poses with his star Shriners' Hospital patient, Lana, 15, who was operated on for severe curvature of the spine.

without surgery.

"It was a lethal curvature," said Lenke. "She was going to die. Four of her vertebrae were touching her ribs. We rarely see this serious a curvature in our country." However, Lenke and his team were determined to do something about Lana's spine.

Due to the severe effects of the scoliosis on her breathing, Lenke's first goal for Lana was to get her healthy enough for surgery. "What's nice about the Shriners Hospital system is that we can keep a patient for as long as we need to," he said.

It took six months of treatment including halo traction, pulmonary therapy and two surgeries to give Lana a healthy spine. After her final surgery, she woke up seven inches taller.

"We had to remove part of her spine because it was so inflexible," Lenke said. "So we actually short-

ened her spine, but now she's seven inches taller."

After the surgery, he visited Lana to check on her healing progress.

"She stood up and gave me a big hug," he said. "And she was taller than me."

It wasn't just her height that surprised Lenke. The fact that Lana is now a smiling, happy young lady shows that her emotional transformation is just as obvious as her physical change.

"I never saw Lana smile before the surgery. She looked desperately sad and sullen," said Lenke.

Lana's change in disposition is indicative of the type of treatment Shriners Hospitals provide, Lenke said.

"Here, at Shriners, we are able to treat the whole patient, not simply her spine."

As Natalia looks at Lana, perched straight and tall on the edge of her bed, she is overwhelmed with gratitude for Shriners Hospitals. She said, "A miracle happened, and it happened in the hands of the doctors. My child was completely rebuilt."

For more information on Shriners' network of 22 hospitals that provide medical care and services totally free of charge to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to: Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa, FL 33607, or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org. Treatment is provided to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriner.

If you know a child Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States, or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada.