

MICHEL F. LEVESQUE, MD, FRCS (C), FACS

Director of Functional Neurosurgery

“I went to my primary health clinic on a Saturday after I collapsed and fell down two flights of stairs. I had a CT scan and was supposed to leave for Texas the following Monday morning and my doctor told me I had to go to the hospital and I had to see a neurosurgeon immediately. A nurse called Dr. Lévesque and he opened the office early to see me that day. I had known there was something wrong with me but I didn’t know what it was and I had been too “male” to go to a doctor. I’d had terrible headaches, and when I collapsed, that’s when I figured it out. Dr. Lévesque reviewed my films and then sat me down in his office to tell me I had a brain tumor. I couldn’t believe it—I just *could not* believe it. First I argued with him and said no, then it hit me. There are no words to describe that feeling. I was 35-years old. I was pretty healthy, and I was now in a position where I had to process everything very quickly. I called my parents, who said, ‘we’re coming out there, who’s this doctor?’ My mother looked him up and reviewed his CV, and she called some friends who were doctors, as did my brother, and it turns out someone my brother grew up with knew someone who worked for Dr. Lévesque. So there was this amazing coincidental connection and we knew this was our guy. In working with him, I found that not only does Dr. Lévesque have skill as a surgeon, but he has a very caring way about him, which many surgeons don’t. I remember talking to a nurse about this during my stay, and she agreed with me and said I was lucky because ‘a lot of surgeons forgot about medicine years ago.’ Not only is he a good doctor, he’s a good guy. I found him to be a very responsive, involved and caring physician. I would absolutely refer Dr. Lévesque to other patients and I would say that not only is he a skilled surgeon, he’s a very caring individual. He has an innate charm about him in this quiet sort of way and he is very reassuring. And if you look at the research he’s done, he seems to be on the cutting edge as a clinical investigator as well.”

– David S., Actor, Director, Playwright

“I was referred to Dr. Lévesque and came in to be seen for my back. I was in terrible condition and had been in excruciating pain, just miserable. I’d been on a Fentanyl patch for a year and a half just to deal with the pain. Dr. Lévesque performed surgery and things have been going great since then—they are much, much better. My initial impression of Dr. Lévesque was that he was a good guy. I have already referred others to him and I’ve told them that he’s a great doctor and gets things done quickly.”

– Greg O., Sound Production

“I had headaches for over a year, and on January 17th, I had a brain aneurysm rupture at home and no one was around to witness it. I didn’t realize what had happened, but afterward I was in bed for four days, nauseous and feeling terrible. I went to the doctor and was misdiagnosed—nobody suspected or realized I’d had an aneurysm. Externally, I looked like I had the flu. When I wasn’t getting any better, I had a CT-scan and was told it was clear the next day. But my internist was concerned because I still wasn’t getting any better. He told me that if my symptoms persisted, I should go to the emergency room. I kept feeling worse and the pain was overwhelming, so I went to the hospital on a Saturday afternoon and had tests run all through the night. On Sunday morning I had a lumbar puncture where they found blood in my spine and on Monday morning, Dr. Lévesque introduced himself in my room and told me he would be performing my surgery. He was able to successfully clip my aneurysm and it was only later that I learned how close I had come to losing my life. I was very lucky not to re-bleed in the four days between the aneurysm rupture and my arrival at the hospital. I had a long rehabilitation after this procedure, in part because my skull had been fully opened to clip the aneurysm. Many people don’t realize that after a major brain surgery, there is a long and tenuous recovery period as the brain restores its equilibrium. You suffer from headaches, short term memory loss, exhaustion, heightened sensitivity to noise, anxiety, etc. Most patients who’ve had a brain injury or brain surgery find this to be the most difficult part—the aftermath. I believe greater attention needs to be placed on this in the healthcare system, because more and more people are surviving brain operations and that means there are more people who need long-term rehabilitation resources. I was thrilled to have Dr. Lévesque as my surgeon because he was committed to helping me access these resources and he followed me all the way through my time at the hospital and referred me to specialists who were able to assist me in my recovery process. In my opinion, Dr. Lévesque has extraordinary expertise and knowledge and is also very gentle and definitely cares about his patients. I could not recommend anybody better.” – **Maryam D., Actress, Writer, Documentary Filmmaker**

“I met Dr. Lévesque many years ago when I was referred to him by my medical plan. I knew he was a Parkinson’s specialist and I went in for a consultation to see how my disease was progressing. The tests showed the Parkinson’s was somewhat advanced. He talked to me about what I could expect from the disease and later suggested I participate in a clinical trial for the stem cell therapy he was developing to treat Parkinson’s. He said I matched the study’s criteria and thought I would be a good candidate. At the time, I was single—I had lived a lot of my life and was in a different position than others who had greater financial and familial responsibilities and more advanced Parkinson’s than mine at that point. I was up for anything that would help me and the fact that the cells were coming from my own body made sense to me. I felt like I really had nothing to lose. So I underwent a procedure to receive a deep brain stimulation device, and when it was implanted, Dr. Lévesque harvested neural stem cells from the substantia nigra part of my brain. The cells were multiplied in a lab for several months and then reimplanted. I felt good after the procedure. I went in every 3 months to get a dopamine PET-scan to measure the effect the cells were having. My tremors significantly decreased and I gained five years of virtually symptom-free life. I think that undergoing an experimental therapy like this is an individual decision, but I’m glad I did it. As it turns out, I was the first patient to receive this therapy and it felt good to be in the public eye. I was hoping it would result in a lot of medical plans allowing the operation so it could be accessible to other people. I was invited to share my experience with the U.S. Senate Committee on Technology and the National Institutes of Health and I continue to have optimism for what’s to come with stem cell therapy. But one thing that’s always bothered me is how upset people get about it when they hear the term ‘stem cells’—I don’t think they realize that the cells I received were from my own body. They weren’t from embryos and there’s a big difference. I would have thought the government would have backed that kind of science, and perhaps they will in the coming years. For other Parkinson’s patients interested in meeting with a good specialist, I would tell them that from the first time I met Dr. Lévesque, I thought he was very professional—I looked at all the degrees on his wall and he impressed me. And during my deep brain stimulation procedure, I was awake. In the operating room, you knew who was in charge. I would do it all again and feel like we can’t leave any stone unturned when looking for ways to combat Parkinson’s and he knows I’m on board to have the therapy again as soon as it’s possible to do so. As I said in a recent interview when asked what it was like to be the first guy to receive this treatment, I want to be the next guy too.” – **Dennis T., Retired Engineer & Clinical Trial Patient**

"I had slight vertigo dizzy spells for quite a while. I just ignored them thinking they would go away. My primary doctor referred me to an ENT specialist who took an MRI and noticed something he didn't like—I was then referred to Dr. Lévesque to obtain a neurosurgeon's opinion. When I met with Dr. Lévesque, I immediately thought he was a very professional man. But my heart sank when he came into the examination room and pulled up a chair after reviewing my films. I thought, 'this can't be good—it's never good when the doctor sits down.' That's when he told me I had a colloid cyst that needed to be removed. Learning this, my feeling was one of shock and horror. I couldn't believe it because up to that point in my life, I only had the odd cold every blue moon. Dr. Lévesque told me that the cyst would eventually lead to blackouts and death so it had to come out. I set up the surgery and, though I'm not keen on hospitals, I was well-looked after. Everyone was very friendly, nice, and helpful. After the procedure, I found out the cyst was benign and I was extremely relieved. It was a good experience overall. – **Ralph T., Entertainment Industry**

WESLEY A. KING, MD

Director of the Skull Base Program

"I had a wonderful internist for many years, and I went to see him for a routine angiogram to review the second of two aneurysms which I have had since birth and hadn't checked for years. The first aneurysm was removed more than 30 years ago by a very prominent surgeon in the city at the time. When my internist looked at the results of the remaining aneurysm, he told me it was "significantly large" and he'd taken the liberty to send all my records to Dr. Wesley King—someone he called a great technician. In fact, he talked about Dr. King and his credentials for 20 minutes, non-stop. Then we went to meet Dr. King. I knew I wanted him to do the surgery and I said to my husband, I trust my internist and I have a gut feeling that Dr. King is the guy. I loved his demeanor and he reminded me of the surgeon who had removed my first aneurysm. In getting to know him before my surgery, I asked him what he liked to do outside of work. He told me he builds and flies high performance planes. That was revealing to me—you have to be an extreme perfectionist to excel at something like that and I valued the attention to detail that kind of hobby requires! Given the glowing recommendation from my doctor, the quality of personal interactions I had with Dr. King, and my understanding of his perfectionist nature, I felt very confident going into the surgery and was not scared. I knew I was going to be fine and was in good hands. I believe choosing a doctor wisely isn't a popularity contest. It's about choosing the best, most qualified, most prepared surgeon. I have absolutely referred other patients to Dr. King—strangers, people I don't know even—and I will, until the day I die." – **Tina E.**

"I saw a doctor in Denver who said I could live the rest of my life with my Chiari Malformation condition. When I moved to Los Angeles, I thought, 'why not get a second opinion' because the pains were getting worse and worse and I thought it might be time to see a neurosurgeon. I was referred to Dr. King and his staff was very accommodating and helped me get in right away. When he looked at my MRIs, he explained to me the seriousness of my condition in a way I hadn't been told before. I decided not to wait any longer. I was very scared, but I felt an enormous sense of trust in Dr. King - he looks at you straight in the eye and he's always ready to talk to you about all of your questions and concerns. He operated on me and the procedure went really well. I have highly recommended Dr. King to other patients without any excitement, and in preparing for my own procedure, I talked to other people who had surgery with him and they also had wonderful things to say. He exudes a sense of calm and humility and he treats his patients like people—not just another case to work on—and that really mattered to me." - **Flavia S.**

“I was having unexplained vertigo incidents, and my doctor couldn’t find anything wrong with me. He recommended we do an MRI of the head, and when the results came back, he told me that the radiologist had found a small meningioma right between my eyes. My doctor said I needed to see a neurosurgeon about this, and he gave me Dr. King’s name. When I went to see him, Dr. King looked at the MRI and told me I could have surgery to remove the tumor—which I found out was benign—or I could wait another six months to see if it got any bigger. So basically I got to make the choice, which is funny, because most people don’t have elective brain surgery. After six months, I had another MRI and went to see Dr. King again. He looked at the film and said the same thing—‘you have to decide.’ So I asked as many questions as I could think of, and he told me all the answers, helping me to understand what the surgery would be like so I could make my decision. I wanted to know how invasive it would be, what the recovery would be like, etc. I remember he explained that brain surgery is easier in some ways to recover from than an abdominal surgery. So I spent 12 months gathering information and ultimately got to the place where I decided to have the surgery. I went in to the hospital on a Wednesday morning and was back at home Friday afternoon, about 60 hours later. The first week or so, I didn’t feel great, but it wasn’t as scary as I thought it would be. And while I was in the hospital, all of the nurses commented on how tiny the scar was, telling me they couldn’t see it at all and that no one would know I’d had brain surgery. I was so glad I made the choice to work with Dr. King. He even came to my house to check on me about a week after the surgery because I had become really nauseous and friends who were staying with me at the time were getting worried about me. I called his answering service, and he stopped by an hour later just to talk me through what was happening, which was related to my medications. The psychological boost of having your brain surgeon come to your house and tell you you’re doing okay did a lot to speed my recovery. The whole experience was amazing, and his staff, especially Chyrell, saved my life a number of times, championing my case and helping me navigate the small details involved in booking such a procedure. It’s great to wake up and realize it’s all behind me now. The tumor hasn’t grown back, and it’s been almost two years since my surgery.” – **Gina F., Producer**

“I met Dr. King through a mutual friend of ours who was my internist at the time. I had some back trouble at one point and Dr. King recommended exercises that I could do to straighten myself out. I feel he is a man of extraordinary achievement. In the bright glare of his impressiveness as a neurosurgeon, I forget that he’s also a pilot. To me, those are two things that take an extraordinary amount of drive to become proficient at. I’m impressed with what friends and other physicians say about how respected and well-regarded he is. At the same time, his humanity and good humor are very much intact. He’s a very well-balanced guy. I would absolutely refer him and would say that I cannot recommend this man highly enough. If I ever needed any kind of neurosurgery, God forbid, I don’t think I would entrust it to anyone else. As a human being with a job that intense, it’s so vitally important to be able to keep a balance in your life between your profession and your after-work life. And it’s important to be able to unwind and to allow yourself to recharge. That’s a skill in itself and there are times that I am very, very impressed with his ability to relax and to crack a few jokes, given the intensity of what he does in terms of work.” –**Seth M., Executive Producer**

SRINATH SAMUDRALA, MD, FACS

Co-Director of the Spine Program

“I first became aware of Dr. Samudrala when he was serving as Director of Spinal Surgery for the Department of Neurosurgery at USC. My sister has had lumbar spine problems for years so we took her to see specialists at a notable Pain Center in town. The breaking point came this spring when she could barely walk and as a former operating room nurse, I knew something had to be done. We met with a few people but I was wary about finding someone good. Then I set an appointment with Dr. Samudrala and we took an instant liking to him. He was so kind—he wanted to know everything about my sister and really communicated his interest in her well being and concern for her. I was shocked. In my experience,

most doctors don't care and they take very little time to get to know their patients. We discussed her treatment options and elected to have surgery. I have to stress that before the procedure, she was 100% debilitated; afterwards she is now pain free. She went from a 10+ on the pain scale to a zero. Dr. Samudrala said when he opened her up, the nerve was black. Not even a week out of the hospital, I literally cried, I was so happy. I would rate Dr. Samudrala as one of the top spine surgeons in the US and can't express the degree of impact he's had in our lives." – **Jeb B., OR Nurse**

"I have known Dr. Samudrala dating back to his affiliation with the Keck School of Medicine at USC. At that time my wife was on the medical faculty. Both of us had referred several patients to him, with excellent reports from those patients. I developed severe spinal stenosis to the point where I couldn't stand up for more than 2-3 minutes at a time or walk more than half a block without being in severe pain. I had always been apprehensive about the possibility of needing surgery for my back. For over 30 years I have practiced as a physician in emergency medicine, and in the ER, you tend to see patients who haven't done so well with their back surgeries and who come in wanting a lot of pain meds. After seeing this phenomenon for years, you can imagine how this sort of put me off as far as back surgery for myself was concerned. But once I saw my MRI, I knew I needed to have surgery. And I only wanted to have surgery once if I could. So as a result, I elected to have an L 4-5 laminectomy, an L 4-5 fusion and a PLIF (posterior lumbar interbody fusion), all at the same time. It was close to four hours of surgery. I went into the hospital on a Thursday morning and was able to go home that Saturday. After the muscle healing and the pain from the actual surgery itself resolved, which took about two weeks, I have not taken a single pain pill, nor have I had a pinch of pain, for the first time in years. I went back to work in less than seven weeks, and have been exercising regularly. Life is beautiful. I have already referred Dr. Samudrala to several people I care about, and I would tell other patients that he's as knowledgeable as anybody could be, that he's experienced in these procedures, and that he is a considerate, sensitive physician. I knew prior to my surgery that he was an excellent neurosurgeon, formally trained in spine surgery, and came highly recommended from a number of sources, including other neurosurgeons." – **Victor L., MD, Emergency Medicine**

"I was referred to Dr. Samudrala by a well-known physician who served as a television expert on NBC's *Today Show* for more than 23 years. This physician had a successful procedure by Dr. Samudrala and Dr. Johnson and thought Dr. Samudrala could help me. I had a great deal of pain in both legs and had tried a series of epidural injections without any significant results. The turning point was when I went and had a meeting with Dr. Samudrala. We reviewed my case and he made it clear that whether I continued with non-surgical treatments or elected to proceed with a surgery, the choice was mine and he would support either decision I made. I elected to have the surgery several months ago and can tell other patients that the pain has not diminished. The pain has disappeared. I found Dr. Samudrala to be a very responsive, involved and caring physician. I have referred others to Dr. Samudrala and told them I had very good results. The bottom line is that I had a successful procedure and that's the thing—when you've had an experience that's good, you can talk about it." – **Gene S., Owner & Director- Public Relations, Marketing & Branding Agency**

LUC JASMIN, MD, PHD, FRCS (C)

"I was rushed to the ER and I was introduced to Dr. Jasmin at the hospital. He treated me for an ependymoma, which was a tumor inside my spinal cord, operating on me twice. The first surgery he performed was a laminectomy of the tumor to assess its structure and the second was a total resection of the tumor. Everything was removed. I appreciated that Dr. Jasmin was very conservative from the beginning—when he first saw me he told me he wanted to take a biopsy first to determine the correct pathology of the tumor. Once he knew what it was, he called in Dr. Johnson, a noted spine specialist (*also at the Los Angeles Neurosurgical Institute*) to ensure optimal outcomes. To me, this showed humility and a

commitment to getting the ‘best and the brightest’ involved in my case which I appreciated. After my surgery which could have had drastic and life-changing consequences like paralysis, I can report that I can do 95% of what I did prior to my surgery. After the second surgery, everyone has been surprised that I function as well as I do considering the type of surgery I had. I found Dr. Jasmin to be very thorough—the most thorough doctor I’ve ever encountered. He’s very accessible, very caring. He answered every question I had without any kind of reservation or condescension and is extremely respectful and considerate toward his patients. I felt I was in good hands going in and was impressed that he had both an MD and a Ph.D. I knew that he was probably more knowledgeable than other doctors out there—he had a science background and a physician’s background. To me, this is like merging the best of the best. I knew he’d worked at UCSF, Cedars-Sinai, and other places that are known as top institutions in the nation and, for all these reasons and more, I would refer him to someone else, 100%. The thing with neurosurgery is that just a slight little mistake can change the rest of your life. And if you’re going in for any kind of neurological surgery, you want someone thorough and meticulous, not to mention knowledgeable and caring. I think Dr. Jasmin is one of those few physicians to merge these qualities. Not to mention that he follows up with patients personally and ends up feeling like a member of the family. He went as far as making sure the scars and sutures were perfect—he wanted to make the surgery as minimally-invasive as possible. He was even concerned about the level of scaring I had. I asked myself, ‘who does that?’ I think it just demonstrates his level of care and concern for patients and their well-being.” – **Jeannie W.**

“Dr. Jasmin was at the top of the list of surgeons who perform the surgery I needed; I was referred to him by my primary care physician who said that if he had what I had, he would have Dr. Jasmin do the operation. I had a herniated disc L-5 S-1 and was pretty debilitated by my injury. I couldn’t stand or walk for a number of months. Afterwards things are 100% better and I am now pain-free. In terms of recovery, a week after my surgery I was walking and standing without any pain. I enjoyed working with Dr. Jasmin and noticed that he really forms a relationship with his patient; he makes himself incredibly available to answer all questions and concerns and really takes time to make sure the patient knows what he needs to know and is comfortable. For me, this was really important because I was getting surgery in a very tenuous place in my body and this was really reassuring. Before my surgery I checked up on Dr. Jasmin, and I learned he was also a PhD so he was a researcher and very well-published. So while my back surgery is very standard—the bread and butter of back surgeries—he knew what the latest research was. The research component was a plus, not a minus. I would absolutely refer Dr. Jasmin to others.” – **Daniel Z., Film Composer**

“Dr. Jasmin, I want to thank you for the wonderful care you gave my husband, Ron. The craniotomy and the Gamma Knife procedures for his melanoma tumor unfortunately marked the beginning of six devastating months for him. And when Ron was no longer your patient, you were so kind and gracious to me—available for my calls for reassurance that I was doing the right thing for him (no chemo), to update you on his deterioration, and then to let you know he lost the battle. Thank you for being a lovely human being.” – **Mary E.**

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