

Local Greek physician called "my savior" by Cypriot patient

Pioneering surgeon Dr. Constantine Frantzides recently joined the medical staff of Louis A. Weiss Memorial Hospital in Chicago as director of its new Minimally Invasive Surgery Center, chairman of its division of surgery, and professor of surgery at the University of Chicago. But for Nikos Ioannides, who lives 4,000 miles away in the village of Kakopetria, Cyprus, Dr. Frantzides was a "savior" sent by fate to cure him of a health affliction he'd suffered for 28 long, painful years.

How? Twice a year for the past seven years, Dr. Frantzides has used vacation and part of his professional lecture trip time to visit Greece and his birthplace, Cyprus, to perform free surgeries, bring surgical supplies donated by Johnson & Johnson, and train Greek surgeons. Dr. Frantzides is a medical pioneer in developing several laparoscopic surgical procedures, in which physicians operate through small incisions as tiny as a quarter-inch long. Such surgery, considered minimally invasive, offers patients many benefits, including minimal pain after surgery, little or no scarring, and much faster recovery than with conventional surgery.

In fact, Dr. Frantzides was the first surgeon in the United States to successfully use a laparoscope to perform an extremely precise operation to treat ulcers. He also was one of the first in the world to use a similar surgical technique to treat severe and chronic heartburn from gastroesophageal reflux disease. In turn, he brought this surgical art to Greece and, in 1991, performed the first laparoscopic surgery, ever, in that country. Since then, he regularly donates his surgical skills whenever he visits Greece and Cyprus. A personal best may have been a visit in 1992 when Dr. Frantzides performed 75 operations in 23 days.

On a recent visit, Dr. Frantzides met up with Ioannides, 59, who'd been diagnosed with persistent duodenal ulcer disease in 1968. Despite medication and exploratory surgery, Nikos continued to suffer. "He was very thin, and couldn't eat much," Dr. Frantzides said. "He was very unhappy. Nikos almost couldn't function in life."

Nikos had read about Dr. Frantzides' pioneering surgeries in a Cyprus newspaper, the Cyprus Journal. "He called me long distance in the US and asked me to help him," Dr. Frantzides said. "Of course, I agreed."

On his next visit to Cyprus, Dr. Frantzides operated on Nikos. The

laparoscopic procedure was completed in three hours, and Nikos was discharged from the clinic two days later. After only eight days, he was able to return to work and full activity. Nikos began to know a life free from pain for the first time in decades. Six months later, said Dr. Frantzides, tests revealed a completely healed duodenal ulcer.

"He was delighted," Dr. Frantzides said. "He called me his 'savior.' When I return to Cyprus in September, he wants me as a guest of honor at a barbecue in his village. Of course I will go."

Specialized training and extensive experience are necessary for minimally invasive operations, said Dr. Frantzides, who was born in Limassol, Cyprus, earned his medical degree from the Medical School of Athens University in Greece, and worked in Nicosia, Cyprus, Athens, and Kent, England, before moving to Wisconsin. There, he was on staff at several hospitals and directed a minimally invasive surgery center at the Medical Center of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. His surgery techniques now are performed all over the world.

Dr. Frantzides now lives in Northfield, IL, with his wife, Lena, son, Alexander, 11, and daughter, Marlena, 14.

Dr. Frantzides has trained more than 50 physicians in laparoscopic surgery in Greece and Cyprus over the past eight years. "In these operations, you don't see your hands," he said. "You watch your instruments on a monitor." (During such surgery, a laparoscope—a long metal tube equipped with a tiny fiberoptic camera—is inserted into the abdominal cavity through a small incision above the navel to guide the surgeon's movements. The surgical instruments are introduced through small tubes, inserted through tiny punctures in the abdomen. The surgical team views the procedure on two video monitors.)

"Surgeons have to learn a different type of hand-eye coordination to perform these operations," he added.

Back at Weiss, Dr. Frantzides may be the director of the Minimally



Pioneering Greek surgeon Dr. Constantine Frantzides holds several honorary plaques presented to him by medical societies in Greece for his many contributions over the years. He brought the art of laparoscopic surgery to Greece and Cyprus in the early 1990s.

Invasive Surgery Center of the University of Chicago.

His heart, however, remains in Greece. "Going back for me is like making a pilgrimage to my roots," said Dr. Frantzides, who was made an honorary member of the Hellenic Surgical Association because of his

many contributions.

"You can be the most important man on the planet, but if you don't return to your birthplace and help, you don't truly fulfill your mission in life. Performing free surgeries to benefit my countrymen, and training its surgeons, gives me great satisfaction."

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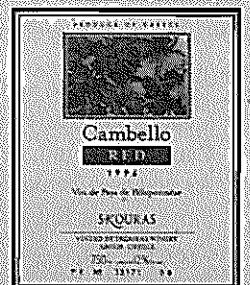
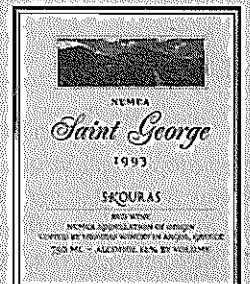
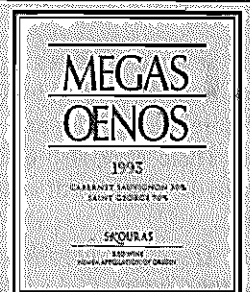
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