

# Mercy Brain & Spine Center

## Advancing neuroscience in central Iowa

*As many people in the “Boomer” generation age, they are more likely to develop conditions, such as spinal degeneration or spinal stenosis, that can affect their everyday quality of life. Mercy Medical Center-Des Moines will soon be welcoming a new group of surgeons specializing in brain and spine treatment for adults and children.*

**D**egenerative spine conditions. Head trauma. Brain tumors. Spinal cord injuries. These are special medical cases that Mercy Medical Center’s new group of surgeons will tackle on a day-to-day basis. In July, the new Mercy Brain & Spine Center will open, expanding neuroscience services available to central Iowans. With a dedicated team of neurosurgeons, patients will be able to receive specialized care

close to home. Three new neurosurgeons—Dr. Chris Karas, Dr. Mirza Baig, and Dr. Bradley Bagan—will provide services initially, with a fourth neurosurgeon—Dr. Robert Hirschl—joining the team in summer 2010.

“Mercy is very fortunate to have recruited these outstanding neurosurgeons to Des Moines,” said Dave Vellinga, President & CEO of Mercy Medical Center-Des Moines. “This group of doctors will provide care for patients with a wide variety of neurosurgical needs.”

What makes the Mercy Brain & Spine Center unique is the surgeons’ spectrum of experience. The team offers specialized care for adult and pediatric patients, including newborns. Mercy Brain & Spine Center will be one of a very few central Iowa facilities to offer pediatric neurological services, such as evaluation and treatment of brain trauma, injury, and tumors in pediatric patients.

“We are thrilled to have such highly skilled physicians at Mercy Medical Center who specialize in the neurosurgical treatment of all patient populations—including infants and children. Being able to stay local, and yet receive leading-edge medical care, is pivotal to families. Mercy is a leader in multiple healthcare specialties, and we will now be able to offer a wider

Dr. Chris Karas, a neurosurgical resident at Ohio State University (OSU), will be one of the founding surgeons at the Mercy Brain & Spine Center.





Dr. Bradley Bagan, a neurosurgical resident at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, has a research background in pediatric and emergency neurosurgery.

*Photo provided by Steve Gadomski / Rush University Medical Center.*

spectrum of neurosurgical care,” said Jackie Frost-Kunnen, Senior Vice President of Hospital Operations at Mercy.

Trained at world-renowned Midwestern teaching universities, the neurosurgeons bring a fresh approach to treating patients. They will offer innovative and cutting-edge treatments while providing patient-centered care.

“We want to approach neurosurgery as a team—it’s not just us as surgeons; we will work very closely with the nursing staff, radiologists, oncologists, other physicians, and the entire clinic staff to provide our patients with the best treatment. We also include family in all aspects of care, from discussing the diagnosis to developing a treatment plan,” said Dr. Karas.

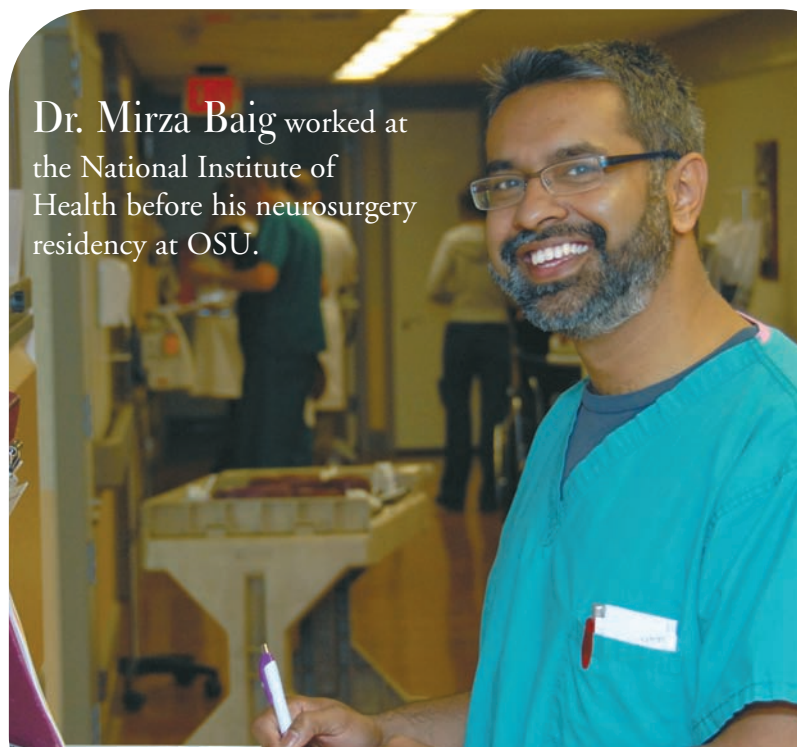
## The surgical team

Dr. Karas is completing a six-year Department of Neurological Surgery Residency Program at The Ohio State University (OSU) in Columbus, Ohio. His previous undergraduate education was at Yale University. While at OSU, Dr. Karas’ training has focused on Minimal Access Spinal Technology (MAST), and various spinal surgery procedures. Dr. Karas is fellowship-trained in endovascular neurosurgery and interventional neuroradiology. He has a strong interest in research and has served as co-investigator on projects focusing on the evaluation of low back pain, the treatment of trigeminal neuralgia, and the endovascular treatment of aneurysms.

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Mercy Brain & Spine Center will begin seeing patients in July and is accepting physician-scheduled referrals. The Center will be located at Mercy Medical Center in downtown Des Moines at 1111 6th Avenue, on the B Level of the East Tower. The office can be reached at 515-358-0100.



Dr. Mirza Baig worked at the National Institute of Health before his neurosurgery residency at OSU.

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Dr. Karas has also volunteered his surgical expertise at the Kijabi Hospital in Kenya, Africa.

Dr. Baig is also completing a six-year Department of Neurological Surgery Residency at OSU. His previous education includes a Doctor of Philosophy in Molecular Genetics from Howard University in Washington, D.C. Dr. Baig also received training on MAST at OSU, and has an interest in neurosurgical research. He was a Pre-Doctoral Intramural Research Fellow at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, before his residency.

Dr. Bagan is completing a six-year neurosurgery residency at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. He completed his undergraduate education at the University of California-San Diego, received a Master of Science in Physiology at Georgetown University, and received his medical degree from Rush Medical College. Dr. Bagan also has an interest in research—including molecular biology, neurosurgical emergencies, and research studies on pediatric neurosurgery as it pertains to epilepsy and autism.

Dr. Hirschl is in his fifth year of the Department of Neurological Surgery Residency at OSU, after completing his medical degree at OSU. Upon finishing his residency in 2010, he will join his colleagues at the Mercy Brain & Spine Center. Dr. Hirschl is fellowship-trained in endovascular neurosurgery and

interventional neuroradiology. He currently has two patents pending for an intracranial drill bit and laminar bolt, along with various research projects.

## Working together

Neurosurgery is not limited to only surgical procedures. Mercy Brain & Spine Center will offer patients expert care in all areas of neurosurgery—including diagnoses of problems involving the head, spine, cerebrovascular (blood flow in the head) system and peripheral nerves.

The new neurosurgeons will work closely with other medical specialists including neurologists at Mercy Ruan Neurology Clinic, pediatric neurologists at Mercy Pediatric Subspecialty Clinic, The Center for Craniofacial and Children's Reconstructive Surgery, The Mercy Center for Pain Medicine, Mercy Spine Center, Medical Imaging Mercy Cancer Center Radiation Oncologists and orthopaedic doctors—to diagnose and treat patients' problems that require neurosurgical management.

In addition to evaluation and surgical procedures, these surgeons will also work with innovative diagnostic techniques and treatment in cooperation with Mercy specialty departments, like the Cath Lab and Medical Imaging.

“We welcome their expertise and innovation, as these new neurosurgeons will partner very closely with the neuro-radiologists and all the Medical Imaging staff. In addition to surgery, there are numerous procedures that can be used to diagnosis and treat various neurological conditions, and we are prepared at Mercy with state-of-the-art equipment and personnel. The Mercy Brain & Spine physicians will complement all of these services and bring additional expertise to this great team,” said Chris Christensen, Vice President of Professional Services at Mercy. ♦

Dr. Chris Karas and Dr. Mirza Baig review a patient's medical imaging scan.

