

A NEW CHANCE AT STUDENT LIFE IN SAN FRANCISCO, THANKS TO HIPSTERS

Author: Fernando Gago

As a 28 year-old International Student from Venezuela pursuing a Masters at Golden Gate University, I was excited for the opportunity to study in San Francisco. The networking and internship opportunities made it the ideal place for my course of study, and I was excited to be able to explore everything the city had to offer me outside of my program. And, this being one of the most walkable cities in the U.S., I planned to do much of this exploring on foot.

However, shortly after I began my program, I began having severe pain that made it difficult for me to walk. After visiting multiple specialists and undergoing several x-rays and MRIs, I was diagnosed with inflammatory arthritis on my right hip, along with several microfractures on my hip and the femur.

As frustrating as the healthcare system can be for residents of the U.S., it is even more mind-boggling to figure out how to use international student insurance to cover the multitude of specialists that were needed to arrive at a solution. On top of that, I was barely able to walk any longer with the amount of pain I was experiencing, missing out on some of the key reasons I came to the U.S. to study in the first place.

I never imagined that crippling arthritis would be something I would need to deal with at such a young age, let alone while in another country. Yet soon after the pain first began, I was having severe difficulty walking without assistance and intense pain that would keep me awake at night. It often felt as if my life now revolved around the amount of pain I was in on a day-to-day basis, rather than my graduate studies.

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Fernando was unable to hold back tears as he walked for the first time shortly after his surgery.

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A NEW CHANCE Continued

Luckily, my story has a happy ending. After a major bout of panic when my insurance company told me they wouldn't be covering my procedure since they'd deemed it a "pre-existing condition" (something that's no longer allowed in most U.S. insurance plans, but which unfortunately was still common practice for many international student plans), I was referred to Dr. Nicholas Mast at the Hipster Foundation, who set me up as a charity case with Presidio Surgical Center, an outpatient surgical center in San Francisco.

Not everyone gets to be as fortunate as I was to have their expenses taken care of. And not everyone has such a clear medical solution to their pain or disability. Thus, I am beyond grateful for both the kindness of my doctors, the easiness in being able to access the outpatient ambulatory surgery center that was able to do my procedure safely within just a few hours.

Around three hours after my surgery, two nurses came in with a walker and a strap which they positioned around my body to prevent me from falling. They helped me to sit up and then asked me to stand up with their assistance, while I leaned on a walker. This was the moment I had been looking forward to for over a year and a half — being able to walk pain-free. As soon as my right leg touched the floor, a tear rolled down my face, followed by many others. I walked the same distance that I had tried to walk that same morning (22 feet), but instead of taking me 30 minutes, it took me less than 20 seconds. It was official — the implant was in my hip, and the pain was at a distant memory.

Navigating the U.S. healthcare system has been far more complicated and frustrating than it should be. But I share my story both because I am incredibly thankful for the care I received, and also because I was surprised to discover how few of my American friends knew about outpatient surgical centers before my experience.

Surgery centers like where I went in San Francisco can provide safe and efficient surgical procedures in a system designed for specialized care, positive health outcomes, and patient satisfaction. For me, such a center offered a second chance at the San Francisco life I had dreamed of, and I'm forever grateful for that.

Fernando Gago is an International Student from Venezuela, pursuing a Masters in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Golden Gate University. He currently lives in San Francisco.



Fernando and his family wait for his operation.

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