

The gift of childhood



You would never know from talking to Victoria Vega that this bright, self-assured third-grader had ever been sick, but as a toddler, she was wracked by as many as 28 epileptic seizures a day. “We tried different medications, but none of them seemed to work,” recalls her mother, Laura Vega. “We finally realized that surgery was our only hope.”

Laura couldn’t have found a more capable or more sympathetic surgeon. Arno Fried, M.D., chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery, heads the Neuroscience Institute at HackensackUMC. He is one of just a handful of neurosurgeons in the country to be board-certified in both general neurosurgery as well as pediatric neurosurgery.

Dr. Fried planned a two-part operation. During the first procedure, he would plant electrodes in Victoria’s brain that would be used to track the source of her convulsions. During the second, he would remove the misfiring tissue.

When Dr. Fried and his colleagues mapped the seizures, they found to their dismay that it emanated from a point on the motor strip, the part of the brain that controls bodily movements. “If we took too much tissue, we ran the risk that Victoria could be paralyzed,” he says.

Laura Vega and her husband, Alex, were naturally apprehensive. “I was crying when he told us,” Laura recalls. “But he assured us that he would treat my daughter the way he would treat his own child. That made a difference.”

From Dr. Fried’s point of view, comforting Victoria’s parents is an essential part of being a pediatric neurosurgeon. “Because we’re dealing with children, we’re really treating the whole family.”

The operation went extremely well; Victoria’s seizures are gone. As anticipated, she had some initial weakness on her left side, but recovered her strength in just a few months. Now she likes nothing more than to play lacrosse with her big brother and ride her boogie board at the Jersey shore.