

## Testimonials from Community Members and Colleagues

Dr. Sonntag has led and developed an incredibly strong spinal team at Barrow, which has become a place that people seek out for the most complex spinal cases. . . we will continue to benefit from all the wisdom he has accrued.  
Robert Spetzler, M.D., Director of Barrow Neurological Institute

He always gives his best to his patients, his residents, fellows and his family. There is not a single false fiber in his body.  
Dr. Robert Spetzler, Chairman of BNA

Please accept my sincerest gratitude for your dedication and commitment to our Community, State, Nation and World. As one of the most respected, talented and competent neuro physicians you have brought healing to countless thousands and as well established Barrow as one of the leading neurological institutions in the world.  
Eddie Basha

Your massive contribution to the field [of neurosurgery and spine] is remarkable. BNI is unique and a shining example of how passion and hard work pay off. I am honored and very proud of you as a man, mentor, leader . . .  
John Burke

Bob and I thank you for all you have contributed to the good health of all and for all of mankind.  
Mary Ellen and Bob McGee

You have always been the person I have respected most in all of neurosurgery . . . You have a special place having donated so much of your energy into mentorship and most of all the need to be above pettiness and greed and be a role model for the young of neurosurgery . . . You have always been the heart and conscience of the BNI.  
Harold Rekate, M.D.

You've had a very successful medical practice at Barrow throughout the years and your reputation is among the best in America.  
Jimmy Walker

When I was new to the BNI you taught me that it was "spine surgery" not "back surgery." You said back surgery makes you sound like a mechanic! I never made the mistake again.  
Julie Ward

There is an Indian proverb: "Great chiefs prove their worthiness." You proved your worthiness as a Great Chief each time you excelled in the O.R. or taught a resident a

surgical or life lesson; sought information from various members of the team; or lived the example of dedication, honesty, and hard work . . . You elevated the game of patient care and inspired all of us to do better . . . we will not see the likes of such a great chief again.

Virginia Prendergast

How many lives have you touched for the better—including patients, residents, fellows, nurses, and colleagues . . . What foresight—to “give up” cranial surgery . . . and go down the path into uncharted waters of neurospine surgery.

Carol Blazer

You have done more for *other* people in their professional career . . . I hope that given the choice, I will make the same decisions you have made. If I get even half of them right, I will be a happy man.

Gregory Lekovic

You have meant so much to [Jonathan], and played such an integral role in making him the surgeon, husband, and father he is. We both so admire not only your professional accomplishments, but perhaps more importantly, your personal triumphs as a family man and human being.

Tracey Hott

I am another grateful patient in the countless number that you have cared for with superior skill and reassurance . . . The hundreds of neurosurgeons you trained will carry on the work you began years before . . .

Kathleen J. Hall

What I liked and respected about you Volker . . . was your passion, your respect and concern for us residents, your love of learning and improving and communicating with each other to find the best solution . . . You have this “old world” tradition of hard work, family values, and deep passion for whatever you do.

Conrad Pappas

You are not only an icon in neurosurgery, but also one of the few truly Great Men I’ve ever met in any field. Your good humor, your genuine affinity for your trainees, and your incredible balance in life—the way you achieved the pinnacle of professional success without compromising your commitment to your family, friends, and trainees—has been an inspiring example to which young surgeons like me could aspire. Yours has been a career, actually a life, which we would all like to emulate.

B. Gregory Thompson

Dr. Sonntag [is a] man who inspires his residents to set the bar of excellence...the neurosurgeon who is so respected and loved by patients worldwide for his gentle and compassionate care . . . To see Dr. Sonntag interact with the residents is to watch a father with his children . . . always available and giving of his time, a very

compassionate teacher, a fair disciplinarian, humorous, gentle and kind.  
Kim Dew, Program Coordinator, Neurosurgery

Dr. Sonntag carries the burden for us [residents] wherever he goes. He is troubled when a resident is not doing well, and he agonizes over difficult decisions involving resident life. This burden is apparent to all of us, and we know that he carries it out of love.

Ruth E. Bristol, M.D.

He has taught us the importance of ethical behavior, academic excellence, compassionate patient care, family life and balanced living, athletics, and humor . . . He has shaped us all, and is so doing, has made each of us better than even we would have believed.

Louis J. Kim, M.D.

Resident, Barrow Neurological Institute

It has been estimated that approximately one half of [all] academic neurosurgeons specializing in spine surgery have trained under Dr. Sonntag as residents or fellows. He is greatly respected and appreciated by his many pupils for commitment to teaching, good sense of humor, and surgical excellence. Dr. Sonntag is equally loved the world over for his compassion and care over the years . . . He is an excellent role model both as an academic physician and as a humanitarian.

Pankaj A. Gore, M.D.

Throughout his tenure at Barrow, Dr. Sonntag has always put patient care at the pinnacle of the educational value pyramid. He encourages residents to . . . understand the person and not just the diagnosis. He has demonstrated the value of offering patients hope, which unlike any other treatment is the one thing that sets him apart as a truly courageous physician teacher.

Phil Pomeroy

Vice President, Neurosciences

Barrow Neurological Institute

Without a doubt, Dr. Sonntag is one of the finest human beings I have ever encountered . . . He has taught by example, leadership, and the way he conducts himself around patients. His advocacy for patients is unparalleled . . . In short, he is an outstanding surgeon, humanitarian, human being, father, leader, author, and healthcare provider.

Randall W. Porter, M.D.

He is a surgeon's surgeon . . . His partners seek his advice daily, as do practicing surgeons in the United States and worldwide. Undoubtedly a poll of the pre-eminent spinal surgeons in the world would place him among the top three surgeons . . . Dr. Sonntag exhibits a devotion to family rarely seen in busy academic surgeons . . . and sets the bar for parental involvement at the highest level . . . To know Dr. Sonntag is to love him.

Nicholas Theodore, M.D.

I always knew that BNI was a unique place in many ways, but you can't believe how different this place is. Everybody here asks how things are back home and after I tell them they don't believe it . . . I had the opportunity to learn from you for the last 10 years, not just neurosurgery; I admired you for many things but what impressed me the most was how present and important your wife and children were in your career.

Fernando Gonzalez

We have been privileged to have been mentored by one of the Greats in neurosurgery. During my time with Dr. Sonntag I learned how integrity, honesty, and dedication to family are the virtues to succeed and find happiness in life.

And from the Nurses at BNI:

Out of the doctors in the group around the time I started (mid 1980s) Sonntag scared me the most. Why? Because when Sonntag [was] angry it [was] usually because the patient didn't get what they needed and he was absolutely correct. Sonntag exhibited strength and excellence in neurosurgery in the early years of the BNI.

I treasure the fact that Dr. Sonntag brings everyone into the team. He never forgets to thank a nurse or an aid . . . never. That respect extends past people to the physical part of the hospital. It is not unusual to see him stop, bend over, and pick up a piece of paper, share a great laugh with his team, or hold an elevator door. His mother raised a gentleman.