

A passion for shoulders

By Matt Hickman

Dr. Kevin Paisley lists three things above all others that he loves in this world — his daughter, his Denver Broncos and the human shoulder.

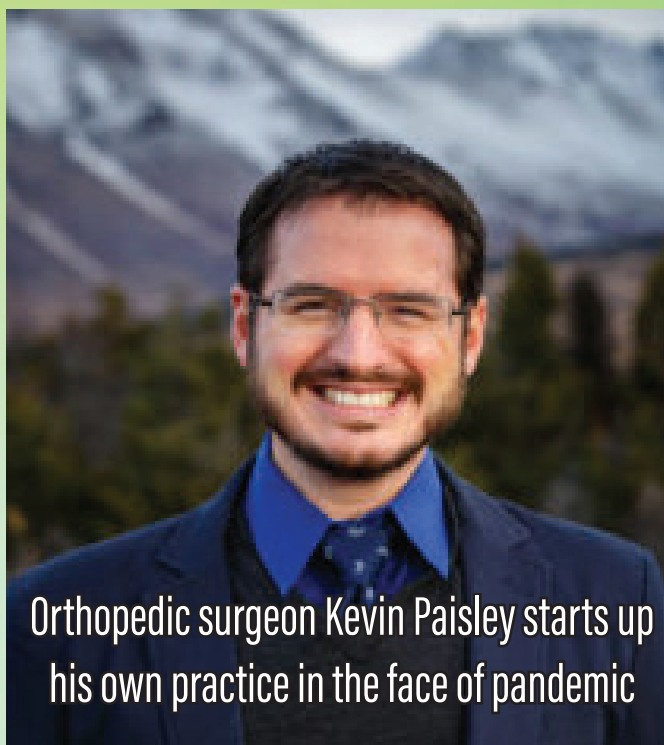
"The thing that gravitated me to shoulders the most, to start with, was the complexity of the anatomy and how it's such an amazing composition of parts that have no inherent stability whatsoever, and yet it has the most motion of any joint, and the complexity around the cuff, as well as the labrum," Paisley said. "I also love surgeries and how you can do everything from minimally invasive small surgical procedures, all the way to full joint replacements and trauma where people have fractures. There's not a lot of sub-specialties where you get the full gamut like that."

A two-time Press Picks winner for Best Orthopedic Surgeon, and one of Alaska's only shoulder fellowship-trained surgeons, Paisley has been practicing in Alaska since 2014. In 2020 he ventured out from his previous partnership to start Alaska Shoulder Orthopaedic Institute, located on the campus of Alaska Regional Hospital. Starting a new business is never easy, and during a pandemic it's doubly hard, as Paisley found out last spring.

"Before COVID hit I had about a two-month wait list for surgery and when COVID hit that jumped up to about four months. I had something like a 70-shoulder operation wait list, which is a lot," he said. "Most people who operate on shoulders, they might have maybe five or six that need surgery and get to them in a week or two."

Whether because of municipal Emergency Orders halting non-emergency surgeries, or patients' reluctance to venture out during the pandemic, putting off medical attention is potentially damaging to a patient's ultimate recovery, Paisley said.

"If you had a delay for, say, six months, there may be some negative changes you couldn't reverse," Paisley said. "With rotator cuff tears and muscle and tendon ruptures the main reason delaying care is that the muscle can begin to atrophy; you could get fatty infiltration and that could lead to a form of arthritis. If it was dealt with in a more timely fashion, it would lessen the likelihood of a re-tear and potentially arthroplasty, which is the fancy way of saying joint replace-



Orthopedic surgeon Kevin Paisley starts up his own practice in the face of pandemic

ment."

Like all doctors during the pandemic, Paisley relied heavily on telemedicine.

"I believe (telemedicine) is here to stay to a certain extent, but it's just not enough to rely on telemedicine 100% for all pre-op care," Paisley said. "A huge component in orthopedics is to ask, 'where does it hurt?' You need to be able to feel and touch in the area for points of pain or dysfunction. It's also difficult if you're doing strength testing, test their resistance and restrain their movement and motion."

In an effort to improve the telemedicine experience for patients and physicians alike, Paisley began developing an app to mitigate

telemedicine's shortcomings.

"The way I was thinking was potentially using an iPhone, which already has sensors built into it, and to generate software that could recognize those sensors," Paisley said. "For example, a bear hug test. For that a patient raises their right shoulder and pins it against their chest on the left side — almost like they were reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. If someone has pain doing that then that would be a positive bear hug test. You can't reproduce that in telemedicine, but maybe the sensor in the phone could apply pounds per square inch."

A Florida native, Paisley did his residency at the University of Missouri where he discovered a new passion of his craft from the patient's vantage point of an operating room.

"I was training for a triathlon and I was on a bike on a small, backcountry road and a Chevy Silverado came out of nowhere at 55 mph, hit me and smashed my arm. I had an open Olecranon fracture, a rib fracture, and thank God I was wearing my helmet," Paisley recalled. "I was banged up pretty badly and had emergency surgery, but I healed up from that and was able to compete three months later. Unfortunately, the next year I was snowboarding and went down awkwardly. Because of the surgery I'd had, my triceps was a little weakened, so I was vulnerable and wound up partially tearing my triceps. That took surgery and screws

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