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Englewood Man Too Frail For Traditional Surgery Undergoes New, Less Invasive (And Life-Saving) Procedure

SARASOTA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL – Andrew Friedel, 77, has escaped death more times than he cares to count. Because of his family’s genetic predisposition to weak arteries, he has survived four heart attacks and an aortic abdominal aneurysm. He has five stents keeping blood flowing to his heart, one in his kidney, one in his abdomen and a pacemaker defibrillator regulating his heartbeat.

Until today, he thought the artery ballooning in his chest would be the one to kill him. He had decided against traditional open surgery because doctors said it would most likely paralyze him; but left untreated, he knew he had a less than 50/50 chance of living another year.

That all changed on Wednesday when Deepak Nair, MD, a vascular surgeon at Sarasota Memorial, performed a new, less risky – yet life saving – procedure to fix his thoracic aneurysm.

“I wasn’t afraid of dying ... Lord knows I’ve come close often enough, but I must say I’m incredibly grateful to Dr. Nair and modern medicine for helping me stay alive,” Friedel said as he recovered in his hospital room on Thursday.

The procedure Friedel underwent is called a thoracic stent graft, a minimally invasive alternative to open surgery; less than 5 percent of hospitals across the country have the specialists, training and tools necessary to offer the advanced procedure to people with thoracic aortic aneurysms (TAAs). Friedel, who lives in Englewood, was the first patient to undergo the procedure at Sarasota Memorial.

Left untreated, a TAA can rupture, causing internal bleeding and death within minutes. Until recently, the only option for treatment was open surgery requiring an incision large enough to allow a synthetic graft to be sewn in place. Paralysis was a significant risk factor.

Using the first FDA approved minimally invasive approach for treating TAA, Dr. Nair used the GORE TAG Device to place a stent in the diseased area of the aorta through a small incision in Friedel’s groin.

“Because of his medical history, Andrew could not have surgery the conventional way. His chance of paralysis was more than 40 percent,” said Dr. Nair. “Fortunately, the people of Sarasota County have a community hospital committed to providing the same caliber of care you’d find in any major academic medical center.”

TAAAs are diagnosed in approximately 15,000 people annually. This life-threatening condition is generally believed to be significantly under-diagnosed because 3 out of 4 individuals with aneurysms show no symptoms. Aneurysms are a result of a weakening of the aorta, the body’s main circulatory vessel.

Clinical studies show that patients treated with the GORE TAG Device had lower incidence of paralysis (3% versus 14%), lower death rates (1% versus 6%), and significantly less blood loss (472 ml versus 2,402 ml) compared to the open surgical control group. In addition, hospital stays were shortened on average from 10 to 3 days and were able to return to normal activity in less time than those undergoing open surgery (30 days versus 78 days).

About Sarasota Memorial Health Care System

Founded in 1925, Sarasota Memorial is a regional medical center offering Southwest Florida’s greatest depth and breadth of specialized care. With more than 3,000 employees and 750 physicians, the 806-bed hospital is Florida’s second-largest acute care public hospital and the only not-for-profit hospital remaining in the region. Among other quality rankings, Sarasota Memorial is the only hospital in the region ranked among America’s 50 “Best Hospitals” by *U.S. News & World Report* and the only one to achieve the American Nurses Credentialing Center’s Magnet designation, the nation’s highest honor for nursing excellence. For more information, visit smh.com.

About Deepak Nair, MD, MS, MHA, RVT

Deepak Nair, MD, is a board certified vascular surgeon. He earned his medical degree at Upstate Medical Center, NY; completed his internship and residency at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Montefiore Medical Center, NY; and was fellowship-trained at Emory University. He is in practice with Drs. Samson, Showalter & Lepore of Sarasota Vascular Specialists.

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