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New brain surgery technique will assist area patients

BY MICHELLE L. START
Florida Weekly Correspondent

Southwest Florida patients diagnosed with certain types of aneurysms no longer have to drive to Miami or Orlando for brain surgery, thanks to a technique that is being used at HealthPark Medical Center.

HealthPark, part of the Lee Memorial Health System, is only one of two hospitals in the United States doing the procedure. The other is Vanderbilt Medical Hospital in Tennessee.

For patients like Phyllis Welsh, 60, who was diagnosed with the condition in June, it has been a relief.

She didn't know she was even sick until she went to Disney World in June, where she became very nauseous and came down with a headache after going on a ride.

Doctors diagnosed her with a brain aneurysm. An aneurysm is an abnormal bulging of one of the arteries in the brain. It is estimated that up to one in 15 people in the United States will develop a brain aneurysm during their lifetime, according to the Brain Aneurysm Resources. They can lead to strokes, brain damage and death if they burst.

Because of the way Welsh's formed, traditionally the only way to treat it would be to cut her head open, find the aneurysm and put a clamp on it. She would have had to drive to Orlando or Miami to have the procedure done and would have spent several weeks recuperating.

"Having my head cut open didn't sound appealing to me," said Welsh, 60, who



LEE MEMORIAL COURTESY PHOTO

Dr. Eric Eskioglu, right, and Katie Knudson prepare for a recent surgery at HealthPark Medical Center, part of the Lee Memorial Health System. Eskioglu is one of only a few doctors nationwide who can do a less-invasive brain surgery, called the Onyx aneurysm treatment, to fix aneurysms.

decided instead to wait until October when Dr. Eric Eskioglu could perform a less invasive procedure called the Onyx aneurysm treatment.

The procedure threads a catheter through the groin, inserts it into the aneurysm and then pumps it full of a putty that prevents the aneurysm from bursting.

"We literally caulk the aneurysm," said Eskioglu. "The putty hardens. It fills the aneurysm. The patient goes home the next day. We offer them hope they didn't have anywhere else."

He trained at Vanderbilt Medical Hospital. Eskioglu performed the first one at HealthPark Medical Center on Oct. 11.

While the Onyx putty has been used in the United States since 2005, it was only approved for use on aneurysms four months ago, according to Eskioglu.

Welsh was one of two patients who underwent the procedure on Oct. 11. She went home the following day and was ready to go play tennis within a few days.

"It's fantastic," she said. "There is no better way to go. It was the easiest procedure. It's hard to believe that I had brain surgery." ■



Jeremy Cox in Candy Cane Photo by Steven Caras

Family Day at the Nutcracker Boutique is Friday, November 23

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Incidence Rates of Brain Aneurysms

- Approximately 0.2 to 3 percent of people with a brain aneurysm may suffer from bleeding per year
- The annual incidence of aneurysmal subarachnoid hemorrhage in the U.S. exceeds 30,000 people. Ten to 15 percent of these patients will die before reaching the hospital and over 50 percent will die within the first thirty days after rupture. Of those who survive, about half suffer some permanent neurological deficit
- Brain aneurysms can occur in people of all ages, but are most commonly detected in those ages 35 to 60
- Women are actually more likely to get a brain aneurysm than men, with a ratio of 3:2

--Source Brain Aneurysm Resources

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