



GLENN KAHL/209 Health & Wellness

An Ultrasound probe searches out a damaged varicose leg vein for a Ripon woman in her fourth such surgery taking less than an hour in a Manteca surgeon's office.

SURGERY

'Lunch break' surgery for varicose veins

By GLENN KAHL

209 HEALTH & WELLNESS

The surgical "stripping" of varicose veins is giving way to an hour-long venous closure procedure that is being offered in a surgeon's medical suite in Manteca.

Annie Baker, 52, had her fourth procedure earlier this month in the West Yosemite Avenue Manteca office of Dr. Mehrdad Amirhamzeh – a cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon who has performed 1,500 like cases in the last year and over 6,000 in the last six years.

Baker is a police dispatcher and 911 call-taker for the Tracy Police Department in one of her two vocations – the other a massage therapist. Baker said her upper leg had already been treated and that she is now focused on the lower half of the left leg before expecting treatment on her right leg in the future.

"I'm trying to encourage my friends to come in because it's just an in-and-out procedure," she said.

Formerly a heart surgeon, Dr. Amirhamzeh operates the Sierra Vein & Vascular Institute in Manteca with a second office in Modesto.

"There's no need to do vein stripping anymore," he said of his procedure.

It was noted that half of Americans over 50 have severe varicose veins and two-thirds of all patients are women. Vein stripping to remove varicose veins was established in the 1930s compared to the relatively new procedure that Dr. Amirhamzeh helped establish.

Patients are said to be able to get up and walk out of the doctor's office after a few minutes and return to their normal activity in one to two days with an immediate relief of pain and virtually no after effects.

The procedure is covered by Medicare, Medicaid and other health insurances as well as the TRICARE military health plan and VA, the doctor's staff explained.

They added that the FDA has cleared the catheter procedure that makes use of a radio frequency "microwave on a stick" to resolve

the condition by heating and sealing the primary leg vein in minutes. Patients are not normally put under general anesthetic, the Manteca surgeon noted, with only local anesthesia used to prevent any surgical pain.

"The procedure has quickly become the surgical standard of care for the condition and has been nicknamed 'lunch break' surgery because busy patients will often have it done over a lunch hour and then gone right back to work," an associate reported.

Baker has walked into the front door of the medical suite about 2 p.m. and was prepped, treated and back out the door to her car by 3 p.m.

During vein stripping, incisions are made in the groin and calf areas and a stripper tool is threaded through the diseased vein to pull the vein out of the leg. In contrast with the newer procedure, only one small incision is made at the insertion site and the vein is then closed and left in place.

Among the factors that contribute to the presence of venous reflux disease that creates the varicose veins are age, gender, family history, heavy lifting, multiple pregnancies, obesity and a standing profession.

The non-invasive surgery is performed using ultrasound where a catheter is inserted into the diseased vein through a tiny opening in the patient's skin. The small catheter is powered by radiofrequency energy that delivers heat as high as 120 degrees centigrade to the wall of the vein causing the vein to shrink. Blood is rerouted to other healthy veins as the body absorbs the shriveled vein.

The Venous System Anatomy is a system made up of a network of veins including superficial veins located close to the surface of the skin and deep, larger veins located deep within the leg. Perforator veins connect the superficial veins to the deeper veins.

The Sierra Vein & Vascular Institute is located at 1610 West Yosemite Avenue, Suite 3, in Manteca. For more information their website is www.sierravein.com



Manteca Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeon Dr. Mehrdad Amirhamzeh points to before and after photographs of his hour-long varicose vein procedure as his assistant Phil Madriaga looks on in his Manteca medical suite.

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