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Little Company of Mary Offers Barrett's Esophagus Treatment That Can Lower Risk of Esophageal Cancer



By Little Company of Mary Hospital and Health Care Centers Friday at 2:05 p.m.



Dr. Brian Blumenstein

Little Company of Mary Hospital and Health Care Centers has a powerful new tool to treat patients with Barrett's esophagus, a pre-cancerous condition associated with chronic gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

The hospital's new HALO 360 Ablation Therapy System uses radiofrequency energy to "ablate" or destroy pre-cancerous tissue of the esophagus that, if left untreated, can lead to deadly esophageal cancer.

"Barrett's esophagus affects nearly two million Americans and is the leading cause of esophageal cancer," explains Dr. Brian Blumenstein, board-certified gastroenterologist at Little Company of Mary, who performs the procedure. "Esophageal cancer is one of the fastest growing and deadly forms of cancer in the United States today."

Michael Grochowski, 62, of Bridgeview knows first hand how devastating it can be. He watched two cousins die from esophageal cancer just months after they were diagnosed.

"They didn't know they had any problems until it was too late," he said.

Grochowski, who has suffered with GERD for nearly 20 years, was diagnosed with Barrett's esophagus about 10 years ago. Immediately, he became concerned that it could develop into cancer of the esophagus.

(GERD is a condition in which stomach contents leak backwards from the stomach into the esophagus, the tube from the mouth to the stomach. This action can irritate the esophagus, causing heartburn and other symptoms. Repeated exposure to stomach acids caused by GERD can result in damage to the esophagus and cause healthy cells to become pre-cancerous.)

For years, doctors of patients with Barrett's esophagus took a traditional "wait-and-see" approach.

Grochowski himself has undergone yearly endoscopies of the upper gastrointestinal tract for nearly a decade.

"It was a little like playing Russian roulette," Grochowski said.

Then, earlier this year, Dr. Blumenstein told Grochowski about the new HALO procedure at Little Company of Mary. A minimally invasive technique, HALO can safely remove abnormal Barrett's cells before they progress to life-threatening esophageal cancer, which has a five-year survival rate of less than 20% in advanced stages.

New HALO Treatment Offers Hope

Radiofrequency ablation is a technique in which tissue is heated and burned away until it is no longer viable. Physicians have used various forms of ablation for nearly a century to treat a number of cancerous and pre-cancerous conditions, as well as to control bleeding.

The HALO ablation procedure is performed in conjunction with upper endoscopy and is done on an outpatient basis. The patient is sedated, and an endoscope is passed down the esophagus. A smaller flexible tube called a catheter is then passed through the endoscope to the diseased tissue. The catheter is equipped with an electrode that delivers a controlled, shallow level of heat energy.

"Radiofrequency ablation allows us to destroy and remove the diseased tissue without harming healthy, underlying structures of the esophagus," Dr. Blumenstein explained. "There's minimal scarring, and the risk for complications is very low."

Most patients undergo two to three treatments over the course of several months until the diseased tissue is eradicated. The HALO procedure effectively eliminates Barrett's disease in 90 to 100 percent of patients.

Following the first treatment, patients usually experience chest discomfort that can be managed with prescription pain medication. They are instructed to eat soft foods for several days and return to normal activities in about a week.

Subsequent treatments usually involve less discomfort.

Grochowski had his first procedure in October and is undergoing a follow-up procedure at Little Company of Mary in mid-December.

“I was very interested when Dr. Blumenstein told me about the procedure,” Grochowski said. “I didn’t want to end up with esophageal cancer and go through what my cousins did.”

The procedure treats only the Barrett’s esophagus, not the underlying condition of acid reflux or GERD. So, like all patients who undergo the HALO procedure, Grochowski still has to take his acid reflux medication.

“I believe it’s better to catch it early,” he added. “I didn’t want to hear, ‘I’m sorry sir, we can’t do anything about it.’ I would definitely recommend the HALO procedure. This is one way of getting rid of (Barrett’s esophagus) once and for all.”

“The outlook for patients who undergo the HALO procedure is very positive,” Dr. Blumenstein added.

In fact, earlier this year, the American Gastroenterological Association issued new guidelines that support the use of radiofrequency ablation for individuals with Barrett’s esophagus.

For more information about the HALO radiofrequency ablation procedure at Little Company of Mary Hospital and Health Care Centers, call 1-866-540-LCMH (5264) or visit us on the web at www.lcmh.org.