



## New pre-cancer treatment at NGMC



Northeast Georgia Medical Center is one of only four hospitals in Georgia offering a treatment option for a precancerous condition of the esophagus known as Barrett's esophagus.

Caused by chronic heartburn, or GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease), Barrett's can lead to a dangerous type of cancer called esophageal adenocarcinoma, which is currently on the rise in the U.S.

"When gastric reflux occurs and exposes the lining of the esophagus to acid for a prolonged period of time, the lining can be injured and break down, causing Barrett's Esophagus," said **Charles Allen, MD**, a gastroenterologist with Gastroenterology Associates of Gainesville, PC.

Currently, the most common approach to managing Barrett's is regular surveillance, or 'watching and waiting,' however, this new treatment allows physicians to diagnose, treat and remove Barretts as opposed to waiting for cancer to possibly develop. The treatment utilizes a system which removes the diseased esophageal tissue caused by Barrett's using ablation, or heat energy, and allows the regrowth of normal cells, usually within three to four weeks. Performed in an outpatient setting under conscious sedation, the entire non-surgical procedure usually takes less than 30 minutes. During the procedure, a physician uses a sizing balloon to determine the inner dimension of the esophagus, and an ablation catheter is then inflated within the diseased area of the esophagus. Then, an energy generator is activated to deliver a controlled, rapid (less than one second) burst of heat energy, which removes a very thin (less than one millimeter) layer of the diseased esophagus and avoids injury to normal, healthy underlying tissues. Following ablation therapy, some patients may experience minor discomfort, and most will continue to take medication to suppress future acid reflux.

"Until now, there have been limited options to treat Barrett's esophagus, and this new technique may allow us to vastly reduce, if not eliminate, the disease and anxiety for patients with Barrett's, not to mention eliminating their risk of developing esophageal cancer," said Dr. Allen.

Allen said they have approximately 300 patients in their practice with Barrett's esophagus, all who would be candidates for the procedure.

He added Barrett's esophagus affects approximately 2 million U.S. adults; however, studies suggest this number may be low. Older men are at the greatest risk with Barrett's, with the disease effecting 13 percent of Caucasian men over the age of 50.