

Local Case Similar To Vice President's

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TECHNIQUE USED ON PLANT CITY MAN

By SUSAN HEMMINGWAY JOHNSON

shjohnson@tampatrib.com

TAMPA - David Galloway, a 54-year-old customer service manager in Plant City, might have lost his left leg without the surgery a week ago to repair a damaged artery behind his knee.

Galloway had an aneurysm behind his left knee, a condition similar to one experienced by Vice President Dick Cheney.

Cheney will have two surgeries similar to Galloway's, including one today on his right knee. A second surgery on his left knee is planned.

An aneurysm is a weak, enlarged section in an artery. It occurs most often in the abdominal region and can be fatal if it ruptures.

Aneurysms behind the knee aren't common, occurring only in four to five out of every 100,000 people, Tampa surgeon Thomas Kerr said.

Galloway was unaware of the condition before a diagnosis after an ultrasound test. His only symptom was a feeling of heaviness in his leg when he walked.

"I had never heard of" knee aneurysms, Galloway said Thursday. "Then I found out that Cheney had it, too."

Cardiovascular patients such as Cheney, who has had four heart attacks and has a pacemaker, are most at risk for developing behind-the-knee aneurysms, Kerr said.

He said they occur most commonly in people older than 65 who have a number of medical problems or characteristics that damage arteries, such as high blood pressure or being a heavy smoker.

Galloway has Type 2 diabetes, a high-risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Kerr operated on Galloway on Sept. 16 at St. Joseph's Hospital.

"From what I've heard on the news, it sounds like Cheney will be having the same kind of surgery," Kerr said, referring to last week's reports that the vice president's surgery will be done under local anesthetic and be minimally invasive.

Unlike aneurysms that occur in the abdominal aorta, the artery that runs through the stomach region, aneurysms behind the knee don't usually burst. Blood clots are more likely, Kerr said.

The leg artery runs behind the knee and carries blood to the foot.

If a clot forms and hinders blood supply, the foot may turn blue or develop gangrene from lack of blood.

"Once the foot turns blue, there is at least a 50 percent chance of losing the leg," Kerr said.

Standard repair for knee aneurysms involves cutting open the leg to perform a bypass using a nearby blood vessel or fabric graft.

The procedure usually requires a three- to five-day hospital stay, Kerr said.

But a newer technique requires only small incisions that allow the surgeon to install a stent that will keep the damaged artery propped open.

Galloway had that type of surgery, which took less than an hour. He stayed at St. Joseph's overnight for observation, then went home. Until the stitches come out next week, he must keep his leg straight.

"I felt fine, really. I could hardly tell they had done anything," Galloway said.

Kerr, who is a vascular surgeon, expects Galloway to make a good recovery.

Knee aneurysms can occur silently or cause only a twinge, Kerr said. But sometimes they can be felt by a doctor when palpating the patient's artery during a physical or discovered through diagnostic tests, he said.

A vascular exam, part of a two-part annual physical Cheney completed in July, identified "small, dilated segments of the arteries behind both knees."

In Cheney's case, Kerr said, "they probably found it through a detailed physical examination and/or a CAT scan from head to toe."

CHART:

Type: Peripheral artery aneurysms affect large arteries that run down the leg and in back of the knee.

Treatment: Small aneurysms may only need "watchful waiting"; large aneurysms may require surgery.

Untreated: The aneurysm may cause loss of circulation and blood clots and possibility of amputation.

Causes: Atherosclerosis, congenital weakness of arterial walls, injuries, bacterial infections

Symptoms: Throbbing

To Diagnose: Angiogram, CT scan, MRI, Ultrasound, X-ray, spinal tap

Sources: FDA, Society for Vascular Surgery Research by CHRISTINE PERRY

Information from The Associated Press was used in this report. Tribune reporter Susan Hemmingway Johnson can be reached at (813) 259-7951.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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Unlike aneurysms that occur in the abdominal aorta, the artery that runs through the stomach region, aneurysms behind the knee don't usually burst. Blood clots are more likely, Kerr said.

David Galloway, of Plant City, is recovering after his recent surgery, with the help of his wife, Debra. Galloway had an aneurysm behind his left knee. He said he had never heard of such an aneurysm, "then I found out that [Dick Cheney] had it, too"