

October 2005
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*Six Minutes of
Important Reading for
Physicians*

The Physician

 Regina Qu'Appelle
HEALTH REGION

Announcements

*The RQHR welcomes
the following new
physicians to the
Region:*

*Dr. N. Adams,
Department of Family
Practice*

*Dr. S. Cheshenchuk,
Department of Family
Practice*

*Dr. J. Danielson,
Department of Family
Practice*

*Dr. N. Kazmi,
Department of Family
Practice*

*Dr. M. Youssef,
Department of Medicine,
Section of Physical
Medicine and
Rehabilitation*

Biventricular pacemaker helps to restore quality of life to heart patients

For patients with compromised heart function, quality of life can be reduced significantly. Cardiac surgeon Dr. Stephen Korkola and his colleagues at the Cardiac Catheterization Lab at Regina General Hospital have a valuable tool – the biventricular pacemaker – to help restore quality of life to heart patients.

Over seventy of the devices have been implanted at the Regina General Hospital since 2003. The program was enhanced with funding from Saskatchewan Health in December 2004.

An unfortunate reality for heart patients is that quality of life can become diminished. “When the left and right sides of the heart are no longer working together, patients experience severe shortness of breath,” says Dr. Korkola. “Mobility becomes limited. The patient may need to sleep propped upright in a chair, gasping for air.” A loss of confidence and depression can impact patients, as well.

For patients with poor heart function, both sides of the heart need to be stimulated and this is the function of the biventricular pacemaker. There are three leads in this type of pacemaker: one lead is attached to the right atrium, one is attached to the right ventricle and a special electrode is implanted on the left side of the heart.

Dr. Korkola says, “With both sides stimulated, pumping action is more efficient and cardiac function is improved.”

According to Dr. Korkola, patients often show improvement very quickly. “They come out of heart failure, they are able to be more

active and are able to return to normal activities.”

The average time for an implantation is about an hour, although in more complex cases, it can take three to four hours. An overnight hospital stay follows, and the pacemaker is programmed in the Pacemaker Clinic, to determine if any “tweaking” is needed. In six weeks, a follow-up evaluation is done in the Clinic.

Pacemaker technology continues to race ahead. And with it, more experience in treating patients is gained. “Our expertise is growing, and our hope is that more patients will be referred to us earlier, as we see that the procedure works.”

The modern biventricular pacemaker that Dr. Korkola and his colleagues are implanting has evolved in a difficult-to-imagine way from the pioneer pacemakers of the 1950’s. In those early days, patients relied on a device that plugged into a wall socket. The wearer could move no further than the length of the extension cord, thus providing an anxious, worrying time for patients, families and doctors.

“In the past, the device was cumbersome and it was a big operation to install. Now, the devices are more sophisticated and the procedure is non-invasive.”

Dr. Korkola works with a team of people to support biventricular pacemaker patients: Dr. George Garbe, section head of Cardiology, a group of trained cardiac nurses, respiratory therapists and John Fedirko, Team Leader for the Cardiac Catheterization Lab.

Feedback

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Physicians and their Obligations under HIPA

Physicians employed by the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region (RQHR), and those in private practice, should be aware of the legislative requirements under the Health Information Protection Act (HIPA). These requirements have been in effect since September 2003 and may affect physicians' office routines and practices.

Under HIPA:

- Physicians are considered trustees for their patients' personal health information in private practice.
- RQHR is the trustee for personal health information for the clients, patients and residents they serve.
- Physicians employed by the RQHR are required to follow RQHR policies, procedures and guidelines.
- All trustees of personal health information are responsible for the appropriate collection, use, disclosure, retention and destruction of personal health information.
- Clients are able to request access to any personal information held by their trustee. *You should assume that any notes may be accessed by clients.*

Those within the RQHR "Circle of Care," in the current episode of care, do not require consent from the patient, because consent is deemed to exist. Family doctor, admitting doctor, attending doctor, referring doctors, RQHR staff and physician employees with a need to know are all within the circle. Outside the circle are social services, general public, lawyers, private insurance, including SGI, to name a few. For these agencies, who do not provide care but need access to the individual's personal health information, RQHR will either require the patient's expressed consent or some other legally supported reason to release their personal health information.

Next of kin and friends or relatives are on the edge of the Circle of Care, because the patient may wish to restrict access to health information.

In some instances, HIPA allows disclosure of personal health information without client consent; for example, for billing purposes, warrant, subpoena and other Acts that supersede HIPA.

The consequences under HIPA of inappropriate conduct by a trustee or

their employees can be very severe, resulting in discipline or discharge, with fines up to \$50,000, or one-year imprisonment and the possibility of civil litigation for an individual. For medical corporations and health regions, fines can range up to \$500,000.

Some key points to remember:

- Client records must be secured and protected until destroyed.
- Personal health information that is no longer needed, including personal working notes by staff, must be shredded, using approved shredders.
- Paper and electronic documents, including e-mail, come under HIPA.
- Access personal health information related to patients only on a "need to know" basis, for professional purposes.
- No public discussion of clients' cases in elevators, waiting areas, hallways or cafeterias.
- Maintain chart confidentiality, never leaving charts open and unattended. Return charts to a secure storage space after use.

The federal privacy statute, *Protection of Personal Information and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA), applies to doctors in private practice. Some offices may be affected by both PIPEDA and HIPA. For this reason, doctors may wish to consult with a lawyer to ensure their office practice is in compliance.

The brochure, *Protecting Clients' Privacy*, is available in each department or unit, all RQHR Health Services Libraries, on the RQHR Intranet and on the Region's Internet Web site. If you need more information on HIPA, you may call the HIPA telephone line at 306-766-3399 (toll-free: 1-866-910-3399) or David Wilson, RQHR's Acting Privacy Officer, at 306-766-6808.

Additional Information is also on the Internet by visiting the following Web sites:

- Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region Web site at www.rqhealth.ca. Click on 'Inside Story,' then 'Privacy.'
- Saskatchewan Health's HIPA Web site at www.health.gov.sk.ca/ph_br_health_leg_hipamain.html

- Saskatchewan Information and Privacy Commissioner Web site at www.oipc.sk.ca.
- The Saskatchewan Medical Association Web site www.sma.sk.ca/privacy offers information, forms and a Privacy Toolkit for downloading.

News Reel

Influenza Campaign Underway

The Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region kicked off its annual campaign against influenza on October 4. The campaign offers free influenza vaccinations to those who are considered high risk. Included are adults 65 years and older; residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities; anyone with chronic lung or heart disease, diabetes, lowered immunity, cancer, kidney disease or severe anemia; and children or adolescents on long-term ASA therapy.

Influenza vaccination is encouraged for all residents of the Region. For those who are not at high-risk, there is a fee. This year, for the first time, children six to 23 months will receive free vaccinations, by appointment with the Region's Public Health clinics, beginning on November 1.

For more information on this year's influenza vaccination or to view a calendar of clinic times and locations, visit: www.rqhealth.ca/programs/comm_hlth_services/pubhealth/influenza.shtml

New Provincial Laboratory Site Confirmed

On October 4, Health Minister John Nilson and Minister responsible for Saskatchewan Property Management, Deb Higgins, officially confirmed the site for a new \$27 million provincial health laboratory. The new lab will meet future needs by improving testing capability and speeding up intervention in the event of a public health crisis such as SARS or an influenza pandemic. The lab will be located at Regina Research Park, adjacent to the University of Regina. Construction of the facility will start late summer of 2006 with a completion date of March 31, 2008.