

TO MEDIA

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AGE DOESN'T DETER WORLD WAR II VETERAN FROM ACTIVE LIFESTYLE OR HEART PROCEDURE TO ELIMINATE NEED FOR BLOOD THINNERS

Independence Health System Cardiologists Surpass 400 WATCHMAN™ Implants

GREENSBURG, PA, June 17, 2024 ...In less than seven months, Thomas Dix will mark his 100th birthday. While there's certain to be a celebration to mark the occasion, the Donegal Township man has already received a special gift that touched his heart, having traveled to Europe with family last fall to visit several national cemeteries where fellow veterans of World War II are laid to rest. Preparations for the trip also went straight to the heart, as Dix was able to eliminate blood thinners from his packing list, thanks to Independence Health System cardiologists who replaced those medications with left atrial appendage closure by a WATCHMAN™ implant. The nonagenarian is now among more 400 patients with atrial fibrillation or A-fib to be treated successfully with the device at Independence Health System Westmoreland Hospital.

In most instances, Dix's age would have been a deterrent to even considering the outpatient procedure. But the Jones Mills resident, a Navy vet, has few health concerns –

unlike five of his six siblings who have all preceded him in death, he never developed diabetes; and his cholesterol and blood pressure are well-managed. Although he uses a cane for stability, he still mows his two-acre yard, cooks for himself and is ready for a road trip anytime he gets an offer. Given these factors and the support of his son, Dale, and daughter, Nancy, who also have no medical issues, his primary care physician urged the family to seriously consider the procedure.

Independence Health System electrophysiologist Bassel Sayegh, MD, initially suggested a more conservative approach for Dix given his age. However, Dix had more and more issues with blood thinners including blood in his urine and stool that were not a result of any other underlying medical condition. In light of this, Dr. Sayegh recommended to proceed. Dix received his implant August 9, 2023, in The Heart Center at Independence Health System Westmoreland Hospital. By the time Dix left for Paris on September 21, his bleeding had resolved, he was weaned from the blood thinners and scheduled for future routine follow-ups.

“There are many factors to consider when evaluating a patient for any procedure,” stressed Dr. Sayegh. “While age is an important factor, lifestyle, vitality and activity level should always be taken into account so that people can have the best quality of life possible. Mr. Dix is undoubtedly my oldest patient, but in his case, age is just a number.”

As many as 7 million Americans deal with A-fib – an irregular heartbeat that can cause complications like blood clots, stroke and heart failure. To guard against the likelihood of these occurring, doctors typically prescribe blood thinners, which come with their own risks, such as excessive or uncontrolled bleeding. The WATCHMAN™ implant offers an alternative to such medications.

During Dix’s hour-long procedure, Dr. Sayegh inserted a small catheter in the groin to implant the WATCHMAN™ device in the left atrial appendage without any surgery or incisions. With the device in place, heart tissue grows over the implant to seal off the appendage and close it off from circulation so clots can no longer be formed in the structure.

With the risk of clots being eliminated, so was the need for blood thinners.

While anti-clotting medications have been around for more than a century, the WATCHMAN™ has been available in the United States since 2015. The WATCHMAN technology is the most studied and implanted left atrial appendage device in the world and has been used to treat more than 400,000 patients in 75 countries. Electrophysiologists at

Independence Health System have been performing WATCHMAN implants since 2021. The health system continues to evolve and enhance its capabilities in treating patients with complex cardiovascular disease with robust programs such as transcatheter aortic valve replacement and repair. Robotic technology also has been introduced at Independence for use in bypass and mitral valve surgery.

Independence Health Westmoreland Hospital is recognized with an America's 100 Best Hospitals for Coronary Intervention Award™ and an America's 100 Best Hospitals for Cardiac Care Award™ recipient.

Already thinking about future adventures, Dix most recently participated in a Memorial Day parade in Mount Pleasant where he once owned Anchor Concrete Block Works and offered a presentation to the Chestnut Ridge Historical Society.

To learn more about cardiovascular care at Independence Health System, visit www.independence.health.