

KETTERING HEALTH NETWORK SCREENING PREVENTS STROKE

Barbara Schimer of Tipp City thought she was healthy. She exercised and ate well. But a free screening conducted by a Kettering Health Network (KHN) medical professional told her she might be heading for a stroke.

Schimer's parents both died relatively young but not of stroke-related problems. "I was totally surprised," she says about her reaction. She received the test at the Anthem Healthy Women event held in June of 2008 at The Schuster Center in downtown Dayton.

Barb Emrick, MS, RN, coordinator for the Cardiac Outreach program at KHN, explains the non-invasive screening utilizes an ultra-sound image to identify narrowing and plaque build-up in the arteries that can interfere with blood flow. "More strokes occur in women than men," she adds.

Even though Schimer was shocked, she sat down with a KHN representative on the spot to get reassurance and advice on what she should do next. That included a visit to her family doctor followed an angiogram—a procedure that uses dye injected into the groin to pinpoint problem areas in arteries.

"I did everything right away," she says. "I moved quickly."

Schimer's angiogram indicated her right carotid artery was 78-percent blocked. A Grandview Medical Center surgeon removed the affected area and replaced it with a Bovine vein.

Sometimes plaque build-up like Schimer's is addressed by inserting a stent, says Gilbert Templeton, MD, FACC, medical director for the Cardiac Outreach program at KHN. He relates a blockage in a carotid artery can cause a stroke, which can lead to permanent disability.

"It's clear there are people at higher risk for vascular disease," he explains. When plaque is found, he calls it a 'disease-marker' meaning these patients have an even higher risk of stroke or heart attack.

Dr. Templeton lists the possible risk factors as: family history of heart attack or stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, a smoking history, and in some cases obesity or lack of physical conditioning.

"If someone has a family history of premature vascular disease—including men up to age 50 or women up to age 55, the risk can be even greater," he says.

Schimer says the test was not only free but quick and painless. She sat in a chair while sensors were placed on her neck. Dr. Templeton says these sensors—which work similarly to those used for a baby ultrasound—use high-frequency sound waves to provide a visualization of the walls of the arteries.

He is happy to report Kettering Health Network is now offering a screening that will determine vascular disease markers at their earliest manifestation. "We have instituted—starting in 2009—as part of our vascular screening process a measurement for what is called carotid intima-media thickening. This is truly the earliest detection possible."

Dr. Templeton says patients can choose to have the test on a self-pay basis. "We've tried to keep the cost as low as possible, and in some bigger cities it may cost more."

"I am so thankful I got the screening," concludes Schimer. "I just hope other people who are feeling healthy consider it."