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CURRENT FEATURE

NEW SURGERY FOR REPAIRING AORTIC ANEURYSMS

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The aorta is the most important artery in the body. When it's damaged, surgeons often cut into a person's chest to repair it. But doctors can now fix this life threatening problem without making a major incision.

Joyce Phillips doesn't look sick. She doesn't even feel bad. But she has a life threatening condition called a thoracic aortic aneurysm. That's when the aorta - the body's main artery - begins to swell or balloon. Once that happens, it can rupture often killing the patient.

"For two years, I've thought about it. What happens if it bursts," said Joyce.

To keep that from happening, surgeons at Sharp Grossmont Hospital in La Mesa are performing a new procedure called an endovascular repair. It's the first one ever done in San Diego County.

Doctor Terramani begins by making a small incision in either the abdomen or groin. He then prepares the device he'll use



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to repair the aneurysm, which is a thin circular sheath that holds a compressed tube-shaped graft. Once that tube is opened it will reinforce the aorta and keep it from rupturing.

"What this allows us to do is repair the aneurysm with a small incision in the groin and no longer requires a large incision in the chest to repair the aneurysm," explained Doctor Thomas Terramani who is with Sharp Grossmont Hospital.

After making the incision, Doctor Terramani pushes the sheath through Joyce's body and into the damaged section of her aorta.

Once it's in position, he activates the device, releasing the tube inside the artery.

As the tube opens, it covers the damaged wall of the aorta, sealing off the aneurysm.

"We're not taking the aneurysm out. We're just sealing it inside and excluding the bulge in the aorta," continued Doctor Terramani.

The tube will remain permanently inside Joyce's aorta, creating a new pathway for her blood.

And because Doctor Terramani only had to make a small incision, Joyce should fully recover in just a few weeks.

"She's going to be up and walking the next day and she'll probably leave the hospital in two days maybe three," Doctor Terramani said.

Since most people with an aortic aneurysm never experience any symptoms, doctor Terramani says people should ask their physician about getting tested for the problem.

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