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Wearable Defibrillator Prevents Post Heart Attack Death

Ochsner Cardiologists Offer Patients World's First Wearable Defibrillator

NEW ORLEANS – February is National Heart Month and Ochsner Medical Center is offering local heart patients a cost- and life-saving alternative to traditional surgery. Called the ZOLL LifeVest, it's the world's first wearable defibrillator for the protection of those at risk for sudden cardiac death. With heart disease being Louisiana's number one killer, all preventive and therapeutic resources should be used for best overall patient outcomes.

The LifeVest is the first "wearable defibrillator" and is worn outside the body under normal clothing rather than implanted in the chest. The non-invasive device weighs under two pounds, monitors the heart to detect abnormal rhythms, and delivers an electric shock, if needed, to restart the heart.

"Sudden cardiac death is a real risk for patients who have heart disease, have suffered a previous heart attack, or have a condition called NICM where the heart muscle becomes weak," explains Dr. Freddy Abi-Samra, Cardiac Electrophysiologist at Ochsner. The most common treatment for at-risk patients is surgical implantation of an Internal Cardiac Defibrillator (ICD), ICDs are designed for use over a long period and require surgery at considerable expense. Due to a variety of medical reasons, some patients who may eventually qualify for ICD implantation, should not be immediately subjected to the implantation procedure. Such patients include those who have just suffered a heart attack, patients who have potentially reversible conditions (such as recent-onset non-ischemic dilated cardiomyopathy), patients with infections, etc...

"In contrast to ICDs, wearable defibrillators are for temporary use, may be rented on a monthly basis, and are only needed for 30 to 90 days," says Abi-Samra. He cites the 2005 VALIANT study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which shows that heart attack patients are most vulnerable to sudden death in the first 30 days following a cardiac event, and after three months, the risk is greatly reduced. This data provides rationale for considering early interventional strategies, including short-term therapies, such as wearable defibrillators, in select patients.

Furthermore, for such patients, early post-heart attack, ICD implantation is not covered by most health insurance companies, including Medicare. The rationale for lack of insurance coverage includes the fact that the heart may recover following a previous heart attack as well as the fact that surgery so early post heart attack may negatively affect patients' long-term survival. Currently, the only Medicare-covered device is the wearable defibrillator. "The LifeVest wearable defibrillator highlights the importance of helping patients in the short-term, preventing more dire medical outcomes, and saving the patient from financial stress," says Abi-Samra. "The LifeVest is a great bridge to ICD implantation or reassessment of a patient's condition." Around the country, patients have readily accepted the device and the reassurance it offers.

"Not all cardiac patients are candidates for wearable defibrillators, only those at high-risk for sudden cardiac arrest are candidates for the LifeVest," says Dr. Hector Ventura, Section Head of Heart Transplant and Cardiomyopathy." The LifeVest is also being utilized by Ochsner Cardiologists Drs. Tim Donahue, Sammy Khatib, Daniel Morin, Onajefe Nelson-Twakor, Hamang Patel, and Hector Ventura at Ochsner Medical Center, 1514 Jefferson Highway.

ZOLL Medical Corporation is committed to developing technologies that help advance the practice of resuscitation. With products for pacing, defibrillation, circulation (with ZOLL's See-Thru CPR® and Real CPR Help®) technologies, ventilation, and fluid resuscitation, ZOLL provides a comprehensive set of technologies that help clinicians, EMS professionals, and lay rescuers resuscitate sudden cardiac arrest or trauma victims. ZOLL also designs and markets software that automates the documentation and management of both clinical and non-clinical information.

Ochsner Health System (www.ochsner.org) is a non-profit, academic, multi-specialty, healthcare delivery system including seven hospitals and over 35 health centers located throughout Southeast Louisiana. Ochsner employs more than 750 physicians in 90 medical specialties and subspecialties and over 300 clinical research trials annually. Ranked as a “Best” Hospital by U.S. News and World Report in 2007, Ochsner has 11,000 employees system-wide.

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