

April 14 -- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE: OMHS now offering stent procedure for abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA)

OWENSBORO, KY -- Owensboro Medical Health System (OMHS) is now offering a minimally invasive stenting procedure to correct abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA), a swelling or weakening in the abdominal aorta.

Dr. Robert Schell, a general and vascular surgeon in practice with Ohio Valley Surgical Specialists, is the first Owensboro physician with credentials to perform the abdominal aortic aneurysm stent procedure. He has had over five years of training in the procedure with endovascular surgical specialist Dr. Matt Jung at Baptist East Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky. Baptist East is a leading center in this technology. Dr. Schell has been involved with assisting or performing aortic stent grafts in over 100 patients. On the basis of this experience, he has performed the first four aortic stent graft repairs of aneurysms at Owensboro Medical Health System using the Gore Excluder stent graft. Under Dr. Schell's direction, an endovascular team of operating room personnel, headed by vascular coordinator Jane Gerbitz, has been developed specifically to assist with performing the stent graft procedures.

"We are very proud to have a surgeon of Dr. Schell's caliber take the initiative to train for this innovative procedure that has proven outcomes for patients," said Craig Slater, M.D., MBA, Senior Vice President of Medical Staff Affairs for OMHS. "Dr. Schell has studied and mastered the AAA stenting technique, and his outcomes are excellent."

During the two-hour surgery, a flexible catheter is placed through small incisions in the patient's groin. The procedure is done in an operating room with the patient under general anesthesia which is felt to be the safest environment for repair of the aneurysm. A stent graft sized appropriately for each patient is inserted into the aorta through the catheters. Guided by x-ray, the graft is positioned in the weak part of the artery, sealing the aneurysm and creating a new path for blood flow.

"This is a new technology now in the mainstream," Dr. Schell said. "The stent immediately lowers pressure in the artery, and this protects the patient from rupture of the aneurysm which is the main goal of therapy. Many of the aneurysms also shrink over time. It is important to monitor the position of the stent and the status of the aneurysm using ultrasound or CT scanning in the post-operative period."

Open surgical technique remains a viable option for treating many patients with abdominal aortic aneurysms, Schell said, but approximately 70% of patients with aneurysms are candidates for stenting. Advantages of stenting include less pain, shorter hospital stay and a more rapid recovery with the patient getting out of the hospital in many cases in one or two days. Immediate complications with stent grafting are lower and patients are able to get back to their daily activities sooner.

AAA is the 14th leading cause of death overall and the 10th leading cause of death in men in this country. An aneurysm can rupture and this can lead to sudden death. Most aneurysms are asymptomatic until such time as they either leak or rupture. Advanced diagnosis is usually made when a physician orders a CT scan or ultrasound for another reason.

Men age 65 to 75 are at greatest risk, particularly those with family history of abdominal aortic aneurysm, hypertension, heart disease or all of the above. Screening of selected groups of patients with ultrasound to detect abdominal aneurysms is increasingly being recommended, particularly for patients with an appropriate clinical history and risk factors that might predispose them to an aneurysm. The screening procedure is a simple abdominal ultrasound which is a non-invasive procedure and usually should only need to be done one time about the age of 65 unless there are special reasons to suspect the patient might have an aneurysm develop earlier than that age.

Dr. Robert H. Schell practices general, thoracic and vascular surgery with Ohio Valley Surgical Specialists, Owensboro; He specializes in stent placement and vascular surgery. Dr. Schell is a graduate of Vanderbilt University Medical School and a fellow of the American College of Surgeons. He is the immediate past chief of medical staff at OMHS and also serves as assistant clinical professor of surgery at the University of Louisville Medical Center. Dr. Schell is a second-generation surgeon; his father, Merrill Schell, practiced in Owensboro from 1954 to 1986.

Owensboro Medical Health System serves an 11-county region in Western Kentucky and Southern Indiana. Our mission is to heal the sick and improve the health of our community with a vision to meet the region's healthcare needs by actively listening and partnering with those we serve. OMHS is a full-service hospital, employing a workforce of 2,500. In addition to acute and rehabilitation services, OMHS includes the HealthPark -- a medical-based fitness center -- home health services, a wound healing center, two outpatient diagnostic centers, the Mitchell Memorial Cancer Center and the McAuley Clinic which provides health care for the uninsured.