



Retired Nurse Survives “Silent Killer”

(NAPSA)—When Carolyn Maczuga retired from nursing, she never expected to be faced with a “silent killer” that would one day bring her back to the hospital as a patient. After experiencing a strange “pulsing” sensation in her stomach, Maczuga, then 60, visited her doctor. Due to her age, history of smoking and other cardiovascular risk factors, Maczuga’s doctor ordered an ultrasound screening—similar to a pregnancy ultrasound—to take an image of her abdomen. The ultrasound detected an abdominal aortic aneurysm, a blood-filled bulge in Maczuga’s aorta, the largest blood vessel that carries blood from the heart to the lower part of the body.

More than 1 million people are living with an undiagnosed abdominal aortic aneurysm, or AAA (pronounced “triple A”).¹ Over time, the aneurysm may grow and eventually burst, often leading to sudden death. AAA is called a silent killer because it often presents with few symptoms, though some, like Maczuga, can experience a pulsing feeling in the abdomen, lower back pain or tenderness in the chest.

“AAA is known as a silent killer, but it doesn’t have to be. A simple ultrasound screening for those at risk can help save lives,” according to Dr. Thomas Maldonado, a vascular surgeon at New York University Langone Medical Center and spokesperson for Find the AAAnswers—a public education campaign that advocates for increased awareness of AAA. “The good news is that when detected early, 95 percent of all aneurysms can be managed and successfully treated.”¹

Risk factors for AAA include age (60 or older), history of smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease or a family history of AAA. As the third-leading cause of sudden death in men



Carolyn Maczuga, now 73, enjoys life with her family after surviving an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA).

over 60,² AAA has widely been associated with men. However, a recent article in the *Journal of Vascular Surgery* indicates that there is an underestimated prevalence of AAA in women, supporting the importance that both men and women with risk factors talk to their doctor about an ultrasound screening.³

“As a former registered nurse, I know how serious this condition can be, and based on the statistics, I am lucky to be alive. I hope my story inspires others to talk to their doctors about their risk for this disease.”

Maczuga’s aneurysm was closely monitored for 10 years following the ultrasound screening. When the aneurysm grew from 3.5 cm to 5 cm, Maczuga underwent surgery to repair her abdominal aorta. She is doing well today, enjoying her retirement alongside her husband and five children.

In an effort to increase awareness of AAA and save lives, the “Find the AAAnswers” campaign was formed in September 2009. The campaign has recently teamed up with Kmart Pharmacy to provide free AAA education, risk assessment and screenings to at-risk individuals at pharmacy locations across the country. To learn more about AAA or to find a screening or doctor near you, visit www.FindtheAAAnswers.org.

References:

1 Society for Vascular Surgery. *Protect Yourself From An AAA Rupture*. http://www.vascularweb.org/practiceresources/Documents/BrandingPDFs/newsletter_story_aaa.doc. Accessed August 3, 2009.

2 Ohki T, Veith FJ. *Endovascular Repair of Ruptured AAAs. In treating AAAs, endovascular repair may hold the key over open repair to lowering mortality*. *Endovascular Today*. January 2004;47-51.

3 Kent C, Zuolak RM, Egorova NN, Riles TS, Manganaro A, Moskowitz AJ, Gelijns AC, Greco G. *Analysis of risk factors for abdominal aortic aneurysm in a cohort of more than 3 million individuals*. *Journal of Vascular Surgery*. September 2010; 52:539-548.