

AS SEEN IN THE STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE PHOTOS/IRVING SILVERSTEIN AND FRANK J. JOHNS

Dr. Inam-ul Haq inserts a thin laser filament into Rosemary Tagliamonti's saphenous vein, heating it from the inside and causing it to close down. The procedure was done at the Laser and Varicose Vein Treatment Center in Ocean Breeze.

LASER AWAY VARICOSE VEINS

By ANDREA BOYARSKY / STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

Rosemary Tagliamonti wanted the pain and swelling in her left leg to stop. So she opted for a relatively new laser procedure that can relieve varicose veins.

In November, Ms. Tagliamonti went to the Laser and Varicose Vein Treatment Center to undergo Endovenous Laser Ablation of the Saphenous Vein (ELAS). The minimally-invasive surgery closed the greater saphenous vein, which runs from the foot to the groin, and removed her varicose veins. It also got the 60-year-old Mariners Harbor woman back on her feet

quickly and with little pain.

Varicose veins affect about 25 percent of adult women and 15 percent of adult males. Reasons for varicose veins range from pregnancy and hormonal changes to heredity and prolonged periods of sitting or standing.

Sometimes done for cosmetic reasons, the surgery,

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Laser away varicose veins

Ms. Tagliamonti said, was all about relieving the pain and swelling she had undergone in the past.

"It interferes with your life," Ms. Tagliamonti explained of the varicose veins that snaked down her left leg. "The swelling and the pain at times ... it's very uncomfortable."

At the Ocean Breeze treatment center her surgery team consisted of Drs. Inam-ul Haq and Herbert Wasserman, both doctors at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, a physician's assistant, anesthesiologist and two nurses.

"I'm just so afraid to go into the hospital — that's what made me come here," Ms. Tagliamonti said. "This is more personalized and one on one."

LESS TIME AND MONEY

Until recently, varicose-vein sufferers were treated primarily by surgically stripping the veins from the leg. That meant a hospital operating room and general anesthesia. ELAS is a quicker, cheaper, less invasive alternative that can be done in less than an hour under a local anesthetic.

Dr. Haq has performed more than 1,150 ELAS procedures in his Island and Brooklyn offices. The Ocean Breeze office opened in April, after Dr. Haq saw an influx of Staten Islanders in his Brooklyn office.

The center is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organization, an independent, not-for-profit organization that evaluates and accredits more than 15,000 health care

organizations and programs in the United States.

Varicose veins occur when the valves in the vein that normally return blood to the heart become weak and allow blood to leak back into the vein, accumulating and causing the vein to enlarge. Valves and veins nearby can also expand, ultimately causing the leg to swell, throb and in worse cases cause ulcers and blood clots. If the veins become too large, they can rupture.

Ms. Tagliamonti, like all patients, was screened to make sure she was a candidate for the surgery.

The procedure began with Dr. Haq dotting the varicose veins with a marker and circling the affected area. Once Ms. Tagliamonti laid down, it was difficult to see the veins.

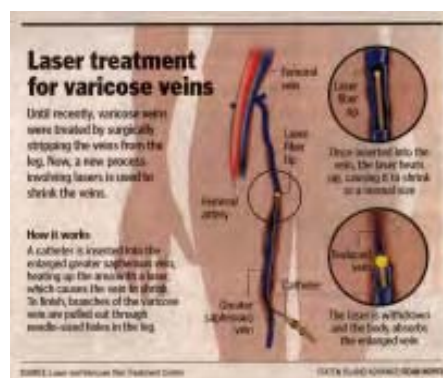
Ms. Tagliamonti settled into a reclining chair. Her left leg was painted with an antiseptic to sterilize the skin, while she was put under conscious sedation, leaving her in a semi-awake state.

"She does not have any pain or anxiety and is comfortable," said anesthesiologist Dr. Shan Theventhiran. "It is the safest kind of anesthesia."

Throughout the procedure, Dr. Theventhiran monitored Ms. Tagliamonti, checking her blood pressure, pulse and breathing and making sure she was OK.



Dr. Haq uses a marker to highlight Ms. Tagliamonti's varicose veins prior to surgery. Weeks later, there is no trace of the unsightly and painful varicose veins.



Dr. Haq and Ms. Tagliamonti prepare for her ELAS procedure.



Physician's assistant Stephen Benson and Dr. Haq use a Doppler ultrasound machine to help them correctly place the laser, which will close down the vein.

BALLOONED VEIN

The doctors used a Doppler ultrasound machine to help them correctly place the laser to close the right vein, which was ballooned. The doctors said Ms. Tagliamonti's saphenous vein was about 12 millimeters wide, when it should be around three or four.

The doctors injected a local anesthetic into the leg, made a needle puncture and put a catheter in it. A thin laser filament went into the saphenous vein, heating it from the inside and causing it to close down. The successful results could be seen on the ultrasound where the balloon no longer existed.

To finish the procedure, the branches of the varicose vein were pulled out through needle-sized holes in the leg. This is called ambulatory phlebectomy and no stitches are needed because the incisions are so small.

It is up to the body to finish the rest. The body will eventually fully absorb the vein and will find alternate veins to flow blood to the heart.

After the surgery, Ms. Tagliamonti said she felt fine and didn't remember feeling anything during the procedure.

Her leg was bandaged, so the results could not be immediately seen.

"There is only minimal discomfort because the laser is hot," Dr. Wasserman said. "I never had a person come back and complain about the pain and say it was so traumatic."

The doctors said most people who undergo the surgery are back to normal life within several days.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

The bandages are usually removed 48 hours later and patients must wear compression stockings for about two weeks to help prevent discomfort. Patients should also take an anti-inflammatory medicine, such as Aleve, to help reduce the swelling. Dr. Haq said he usually sees his patients around three times after the procedure.

"I feel like my leg is a new leg," said Ms. Tagliamonti several weeks after the surgery. "It was just so hot and heavy before. I can now sleep at night without waking up."

She added that her varicose veins are completely gone.

There is no way to prevent varicose veins — since they can be hereditary — but exercise can help because it keeps the blood pumping back to the heart.

The veins can appear again years after the surgery and can be treated, although with

the laser surgery, there is less than a 1 percent chance they will return, Dr. Haq said.

The laser procedure, which also goes by other names such as EVLT, is covered by most insurance companies and Medicare, the doctors said. It is not covered, however, for purely cosmetic reasons and patients must show symptoms of varicose veins. The procedure is also recognized as the preferred method of treatment.

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