

Chicago man breathes again thanks to Northwestern Medicine study

November 19 2013

Seven years ago, Keith Brown decided to skip the elevator and take the stairs to the ninth floor of the Chicago parking garage where he worked.

He only made it to the sixth floor.

"I was gasping for air," Brown said. "This wasn't something that comes from being a little out of shape or from getting a little older. I knew something was seriously wrong."

Brown was diagnosed with COPD and [emphysema](#), the third leading cause of death in the United States, only behind heart disease and cancer. Right now, the only studied interventions that prolong life for patients with severe COPD are supplemental oxygen in people with low oxygen levels and [lung](#) volume reduction surgery (LVRS) in appropriately selected individuals. Like most COPD patients, Brown was given medication but told there was no cure. He was 58 years old.

"I figured this was my life, it's not going to get any better," he said. "It got so bad for me that I sometimes couldn't walk up a flight of stairs. I was frustrated because I'm not a lay-on-the-couch kind of person. I thought there had to be something else for me."

There was. It's a new investigational treatment that Northwestern Medicine pulmonologists are hoping will provide the same benefits as having major surgery. Brown was the first individual at Northwestern Memorial Hospital to enroll in a clinical trial that involves having metal

coils implanted in each lung to create more room for the healthier areas of the lung to expand and function better. This Lung Volume Reduction Coil works by squeezing the diseased portions of the lung and by doing so, the coil creates more room for the healthier areas of the lung to expand and function better.

"When I woke up from the second procedure, I felt better almost right away," said Brown, a London native who moved to Chicago 30 years ago. "It was such a huge improvement that a few days later I was jumping around like a two year old."

Ravi Kalhan, MD, pulmonologist and director of the asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) program at Northwestern Memorial oversaw the procedure where 10 metal coils were inserted into Brown's left lung in April. Another group of 10 coils were inserted in his right lung in August.

"This FDA approved trial is an important step forward for the COPD community," Kalhan said. "We need to test novel therapies that may improve the lives of people living with COPD, and our program at Northwestern is thrilled to offer participation in this study to our patients."

One of the major reasons that people living with COPD feel breathless when they do things is called lung hyperinflation. This is when too much air gets stuck in the lungs of individuals with emphysema. It occurs because under normal circumstances, the lungs are like a balloon – they are rubbery and elastic, and when air goes into them, their natural function is to deflate and let the air back out. With emphysema, the lungs lose their elasticity so the deflation is diminished, Kalhan said.

"These lung coils could be a game changer for individuals living with emphysema," said Colin Gillespie, MD, pulmonologist and director of

interventional pulmonology at Northwestern Medicine "Our hope is that patients with emphysema will have an improved quality of life, better exercise capacity and improved lung function at substantially less risk."

Provided by Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Citation: Chicago man breathes again thanks to Northwestern Medicine study (2013, November 19) retrieved 11 May 2024 from

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