

You're So Vein

Vein Clinic provides *specialized treatments* for varicose and spider veins **BY JOHN BERGGREN**

For years, Janet Bower, 63, of Chapman, coped with itching and burning sensations from varicose veins in her legs and had challenges finding shoes that wouldn't aggravate a varicose vein on top of her left ankle. A long career in nursing, including more than 20 years as an operating room nurse, and bad genetics seemed to have taken a toll on her legs.

"My mom had terrible problems with veins in her legs," says Bower, who continues working today as a paraeducator at McKinley Grade School in Abilene. "Long hours on my feet all these years didn't help any, and pregnancy probably also played a role.

"It was annoying and painful," Bower says. "My legs were really ugly too. I didn't want to wear shorts or capri pants, or go to the pool. I knew there were things that could be done but I just felt like I'd been through a lot."

Bower finally turned to Salina Regional Health Center's Vein Clinic for help. Cardiothoracic and vascular surgeon Richard Toon, MD; general surgeon Justin Klaassen, DO; and nurse practitioner Barb Gack provide specialized treatments for all types of varicose and spider veins.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

The Vein Clinic uses vein ablation procedures and minor ambulatory surgical techniques to treat diseased veins, depending on their size, symptoms and location. Large, bulging varicose



Janet Bower at a follow-up consultation with nurse practitioner Barb Gack following treatment for varicose veins in both legs

veins may require phlebectomy, or removal through small incisions using local anesthesia injected at the site. Other veins can be treated with laser ablation, where a doctor inserts a special wire that heats and seals the diseased vein from the inside. With laser ablation, the vein stays in place, but no longer carries blood and eventually becomes invisible.

For smaller, superficial spider veins, sclerotherapy is often used, in which a solution injected into the vein causes it to collapse and seal shut. These veins also are eventually absorbed by the body and become invisible.

Bower underwent all three forms of treatment at various locations on her legs. She was surprised at how painless the procedures were.

"All I really ever felt was the small prick of the local anesthetics—kind of like a mosquito bite," Bower says. "As a traditional surgery nurse, I was expecting there to be some wrenching around and discomfort associated with it, but there was none. I wish I would have done this 20 years ago."

Patients are asked to recline and rest as much as possible at home on the day of a procedure. They also must wear compression stockings for a period of time following a procedure. Restrictions on tanning or exposure to direct sunlight may also be necessary, depending on



Justin Klaassen, DO



Richard Toon, MD

the procedure performed. Many patients choose to seek treatment during the fall and winter months because of these restrictions.

"Many patients return to work and regular activity the day after a procedure," says Klaassen, who treated Bower. "Heavy lifting and strenuous exercise should be limited for two weeks following a procedure. The compression stockings help reduce inflammation and keep blood from pooling in diseased veins, and that helps patients heal."

TYPES OF CAUSES

Normally, veins in the legs carry blood back to the heart using tiny valves to keep the blood flowing in the right direction. When these valves in the vein fail, blood begins to pool, which causes them to swell and change color. Varicose veins, spider veins, leg pain and even open sores can result.

"Usually these conditions affect women, and it seems to run in families," Toon says. "Pregnancy releases hormones in the body that cause veins to dilate and weaken. Blood clots, leg injuries, age, weight and smoking also can contribute."

Treatments for medical conditions are covered by most insurance. The clinic also treats cosmetic conditions. ■■■



DON'T LIVE WITH THE DISCOMFORT

Call the Vein Clinic at Salina Regional Health Center at **785-493-VEIN (493-8346)** for more information and to schedule a consultation.