

No More Worries

Patient happy that her brain surgery could take place *close to home*

BY JOHN BERGGREN

Wanda Platz, a native of rural Herington, would describe herself as a chronic worrier. When she learned last year at Christmas time that she would have to undergo brain surgery to stop a cerebrospinal fluid leak draining from her ear, her anxieties may have briefly reached a new peak.

"I remember asking a lot of questions and just being in awe of the situation," Platz says. "I didn't feel that I was terribly sick, and of course I was apprehensive. But, the doctor quickly set me at ease and fortunately my husband was there to help me retain all the information."

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Chronic sinus and ear infections had eroded a hole through the mastoid bone behind Platz's ear and lining around the brain to create a passageway for her cerebrospinal fluid to leak. Her ear, nose and throat doctor in Salina, Mark Bell, MD, first tried a less-invasive approach to patch the leak with a procedure through Platz's ear, which ultimately proved to be unsuccessful.

"It's a fascinating case and one of those times where you try the least invasive option first," says Justin Whitlow, MD, Platz's neurosurgeon. "You usually see cerebrospinal fluid leaks as the result of a traumatic head injury. But, chronic ear infections can erode into the intracranial space. A craniotomy and open surgery is the definitive treatment for a situation like this."

Wanda Platz, Herington, tends to her flowers at home on the farm this summer after undergoing brain surgery earlier this year.



Patients with leaking cerebrospinal fluid are at an increased risk for bacterial infections, which are especially dangerous when the brain and central nervous system are involved. Platz knew she had to go forward with surgery but wanted to wait until the holidays and her grandson's second birthday party had passed. She went home with antibiotics and had her surgery Jan. 2.

Whitlow used Salina Regional's Brainlab Surgical System to precisely remove a portion of Platz's skull over her ear and guide the operation. Once inside, Whitlow cleaned up the mastoid bone where infection had created a hole and packed it with Platz's own tissue so it would heal and close.

He also used a synthetic graft on the inside and outside of the lining around the brain to seal the leak.

Platz remained in the hospital for a week to give her time to heal, but the surgery was an immediate success.

"The surgery was just something that needed to be done," Platz says. "Everything went as planned and Dr. Whitlow and the nurses convinced me not to create any extra worry when there was no need for it."

BACK TO LIFE

Whitlow, who more commonly performs brain surgeries for cyst and tumor removals, stroke, and traumatic head injuries, says a good



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Scott Boswell, MD

NEUROSURGEON JOINS PRACTICE

Salina Regional Neurosurgery welcomed the addition of Scott Boswell, MD, who began seeing patients in August. He joins Justin Whitlow, MD, and Ali Manguoglu, MD, providing an array of brain and spine surgeries through the clinic.

Boswell received his medical degree at the University of Kansas School of Medicine and his neurological surgery training at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.

Boswell specializes in surgery of the brain, spinal cord and peripheral nerves, including treatment for spinal fractures, pinched nerves, herniated disks, carpal tunnel syndrome, and primary and metastatic tumors. In addition to his practice in Salina, he also holds a monthly outpatient clinic on the second Tuesday of each month in Great Bend at the St. Rose Ambulatory & Surgery Center.

portion of his time with patients is spent on education and putting them at ease.

"The thought of brain surgery is often distressing to a patient, but most of the time it's the only option available to them," Whitlow says. "These aren't elective procedures. They're procedures that need to be done."

"Brain surgery is usually very well tolerated by patients and typically it's safe," Whitlow says. "For tumors, most people feel better right away and any neurological deficits are resolved immediately."

Just three weeks after surgery, Platz was back to work at Neosho Gardens in Council Grove, where she has worked for 30 years. Her time with family on the farm and cherished 2-year-old grandson was barely interrupted.



Just 18 days after surgery, Platz's incision was nearly healed and her hair was growing back.

"Looking back, it's hard to believe I even went through brain surgery," Platz says. "Your hair grows back and I'm glad everything was fixable. It's a blessing Salina can offer these services and that Dr. Whitlow, who grew up in the area, came back home to practice once his training was done." ■



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