

HEALTH

Procedure Offers Hope for High Cholesterol

By GWEN MURANAKA
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Lower your cholesterol. It's a common refrain heard as high LDL cholesterol levels are associated with greater risk of heart disease and heart attacks. For those who have been unsuccessful in controlling their cholesterol through diet, exercise and medication, Dr. Thomas Hirose, a transfusion specialist, offers a treatment that mechanically removes bad cholesterol from the blood.

"Japan actually developed the treatment 10 years before it was licensed in the U.S., so it's been around for awhile," said Dr. Hirose, speaking at his office at Good Samaritan Hospital.

Called liposorber apheresis, the treatment involves removing LDL cholesterol in a process that takes two to three hours, once every two weeks. The blood is withdrawn through a needle in a vein in one arm and returned in the other. The machine separates plasma from whole blood; LDL cholesterol is removed from the plasma and returned into the body.

A graduate of UCLA medical school, Dr. Hirose noted that many Japanese carry a genetic mutation that gives them abnormally high cholesterol, despite their weight or level of physical activity. The transfusion specialist said he wanted to get the word out to the Japanese American community, since many JAs may also carry the mutation.

"I can remember friends and family who had one or two people who had heart problems or died very early," Dr. Hirose said. "If they inherit a double dose, if they're homozygous, they'll start to have symptoms usually before they're 10 and usually they'll have a heart attack by the time they're 20. They won't be around by the time they're 30."

Dr. Hirose's patients all have LDL



Photo by GWEN MURANAKA/Rafu Shimpo

Dr. Thomas Hirose, a transfusion medicine specialist, stands in front of the machine used to remove LDL cholesterol in a procedure called liposorber apheresis at his office at Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles.

cholesterol above 300 without heart disease or greater than 200 with heart disease. Patients must also have shown that their cholesterol levels didn't respond to medication. He currently has 12 patients and works with Saddleback Memorial Medical Center, Little Company of Mary Hospital and his main office in Good Samaritan.

Dr. Hirose said the procedure has been found to reduce LDL levels by 73 to 83 percent after one treatment.

"We want to catch it before they get heart disease. It's really an upstream battle once it calcifies to hard plaque," said Dr. Hirose.

For more information, call (877) 393-5700 or e-mail info@TMAService.com.