Experimental procedure adds years to the life of a Twisp man with heart failure

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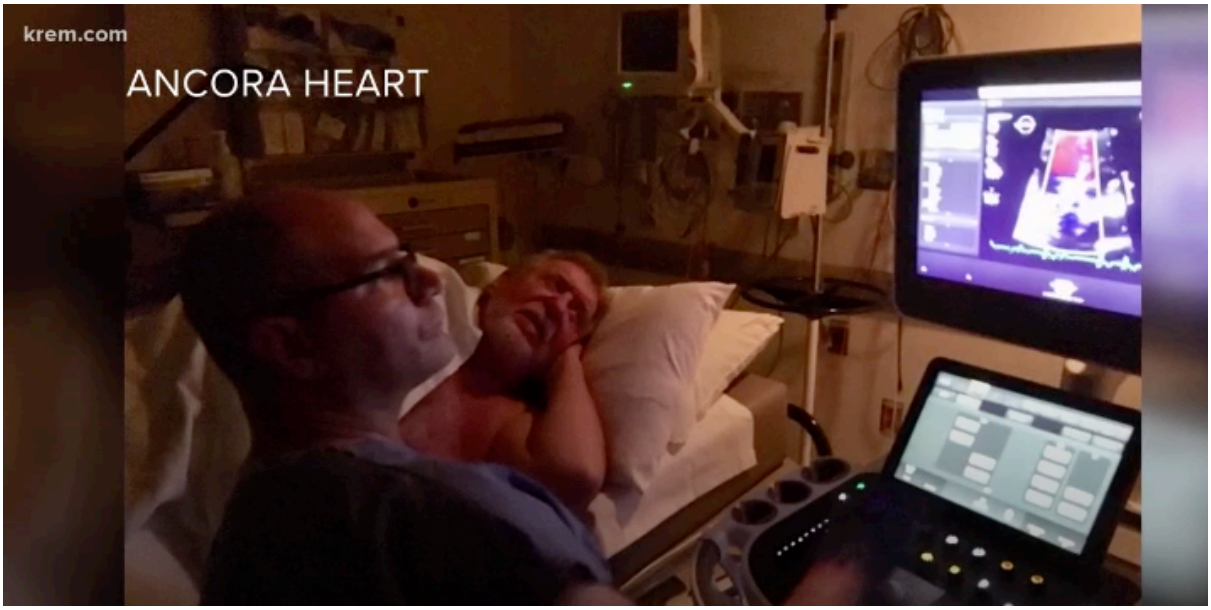

Link to video: https://youtu.be/w2n4AJzI-AY

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TWISP, Wash. -- Heart failure effects an estimated 6.5 Million people in the United States and 25 million people worldwide.

It is a condition where the heart's muscles slowly weaken and loses its ability to pump enough oxygen- rich blood to the body. UW Medicine in Seattle is part of a clinical trial that could give hope for the elderly and people who are too sick for surgery.

Edward Ward, 74, is from Twisp, and the first patient on the west coast, 14th in the country and 25th in the world to undergo this experimental procedure.

"It's nice to have full breaths," Ward said.

Last year, was something completely different for Ward.

"I was heavier, full of water, crept up on me so slow. I just really didn't understand what was going on, it was so gradual, then when it hit me it let me know that it was there," Ward explained.

He could not walk very far or perform very simple tasks without experiencing shortness of breath and fatigue.

"Normally, I'd work hard in the summertime yards and lawn digging this that and the other, cause I live on the river there and got lots of lawns and lots of landscaping and flowers and gardens. I just couldn't do it last year, I just couldn't do it and then crashed and burned," he said.

He chalked it up to being a little out of shape and put off seeing his family doctor as long as he could.

After that visit, he knew he could not wait to see a cardiologist.

“I'd be dead by then,“ he said.

Several rounds of tests later, Ward was diagnosed with heart failure and what he calls, a leaky mitral valve.He was then referred to the structural heart team at UW Medicine in Seattle.

"When he was referred to me back in the fall he was having class three, class four heart failure, he could only walk about 20 feet before he got short of breath before he had to stop, so very limiting for him," Dr. Creighton Don, UW Interventional Cardiologist said.

Ward was also diagnosed with Functional Mitral Regurgitation or FMR, a common but serious disease that occurs when the wall of the heart becomes enlarged to the point that it pulls apart and stretches the muscles and valves inside the heart. The condition causes blood to flow backwards and into the lungs. The lungs become congested with blood and fluid causing severe breathing problems in patients.

There is no cure for heart failure or FMR. About half of the people who develop heart failure die within five years of diagnosis. He had no idea how much time he had left.

"I didn't sleep for three weeks, afraid to, I didn't think I'd wake up," Ward explained.

He did not give up. Just a month after an experimental minimally invasive heart surgery, years have been added to his life. He has made progress thanks to the miracle of modern medicine. While the combination of his age and heart failure made him a high risk for conventional heart surgery, he was the perfect patient to participate in a national study.

"After we tuned him up medically, he was probably in reasonable condition for surgery but he was still high risk. Again the problem with just fixing the valve instead of a ventricular problem will not be solved with surgery alone," Don said.

The heart team at the University Of Washington Medical Center offered him an alternative therapy called 'The Accucinch Procedure.' Doctors threaded a catheter, a tube with a small opening, through Ward's leg and into his heart where a collar-like device designed with a cable and series of anchors was implanted to treat the root cause of Ward’s heart failure .

It is the first therapy of its kind. The cable connecting the anchors was then tightened to cinch the anchors together like a belt. This seemingly simple device, developed by Ancora Heart, is

intended to strengthen and decrease the size of the heart, reduce symptoms and improve the quality of life for patients. Doctors are happy with Wards first follow up appointment.

“Once we discovered a technology that was affective, we started realizing that there are a lot of patients sitting in nursing homes or who are on hospice or who were not even seeing a physician who were told there were no options and there are a lot of these patients who have come out of the woodwork so to speak that we can offer a benefit to, “Don said.

Ward may be older but he feels young at heart.

“I'm gonna be 75-years-old. I guess you could say I'm up there, but not so bad that I don’t have another five or ten in me at least, ya know? So, I feel to good to think I’m over the hill ya know, never think that yet but anyway I’m having a good time with it because I feel so good," Ward explained.

The procedure has been proven effective in animals, but doctors are still learning how the device behaves in humans. Don said they are just scratching the surface at this point, but within 10 years this procedure will be as commonplace as the stents that are used to treat patients with blocked arteries.

UW Medicine is evaluating prospective candidates for the clinical trial.

Kate Jordan, research coordinator for UW Medical Center is the best contact for prospective trial enrollees. You can email her at Jordank1@uw.edu

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