

New procedure offers new option for Atrial Fibrillation resolution *Mini-maze now performed at LMCHH*

(*St. Tammany Parish, 12-1-09*) – Like most people suffering from atrial fibrillation, or “AFib,” 55-year-old James Senac of Mandeville was put on the powerful blood thinner Coumadin to help prevent complications of the skipped beats. Unfortunately, Senac turned out to have problems taking the medication. While there used to be few pleasant options for managing the disease for people like him who couldn’t tolerate such medicines, he learned that a new cutting edge, minimally invasive surgery could stop the condition.

“When I started having reactions to Coumadin, my doctor said there was an alternative and that I was a good candidate,” said Senac, a United Parcel Service manager. “And once I had the Mini-maze, I was not in AFib again.”

Performed by **noted cardiothoracic surgeon John Breaux, M.D., the Mini-Maze was introduced locally by Dr. Breaux** at Louisiana Medical Center & Heart Hospital, and it is now one of the procedures offered through LMCHH’s Heart Rhythm Center.

“In the Mini-Maze, the surgeon makes small incisions on either side of the chest and uses an energy source to make precise scars on the heart, blocking the electrical impulses causing the fibrillation,” explained Dr. Breaux, M.D. “The procedure does not require use of the heart/lung machine. **This is a substantial advancement as it is a minimally invasive approach to surgically resolve AFib. Patients go home within several days and won’t experience the long, difficult recovery of traditional open-chest surgery.**”

Atrial fibrillation, or “AFib,” is the most common cause of irregular heartbeat, affecting more than five million Americans. Once considered harmless, Afib is now known to lead to congestive heart failure and stroke.

“What’s significant about these procedures is that until now the options available to AFib patients were unattractive at best, requiring a lifetime of anticoagulant therapy, a permanent pacemaker, or a difficult, invasive operation,” said Dr. Breaux. “Depending on the patient’s specific condition, one of these progressive options may be the optimal choice. The chance to be free of blood thinners is one of the prime reasons AFib sufferers tell me they’re interested in the Mini-Maze.”

While the Mini-maze resolved Senac’s AFib, further cardiac care was needed months later when his cardiologist discovered blockage in his major arteries, despite a history of a normal stress test prior to his ablation, and Dr. Breaux had to perform by-pass surgery. He said his largest concern with AFib was his worry over the possibility of blood clots, a major threat with AFib.

Symptoms of AFib include skipped heartbeats, heart palpitations and lightheadedness. AFib occurs when the two upper chambers of the heart quiver instead of beating normally. Because blood is not completely pumped out of the heart, it may clot and become lodged in an artery in the brain, causing a stroke. People with a history of high blood pressure, thyroid, lung or nerve conditions, heart attack, leaky valves, artery disease or inflammation near the heart, can develop AFib.

People who have AFib continuously for years will have less chance of success while persons whose AFib comes and goes, on its own or with help, have a better chance of success. **There is a better chance of success when AFib is treated relatively early, Dr. Breaux said.**

He said the patient's cardiologist can help guide him or her in deciding what treatment options are best.

For more information on the Mini-Maze or other procedures to treat AFib, members of the public may consult their cardiologist or call the Heart Rhythm Center at **985-690-7964** for possible referral to the LMCHH Heart Rhythm Center.

About Louisiana Medical Center & Heart Hospital

Opened in 2003 in the heart of St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana Medical Center & Heart Hospital (LMCHH) is an acute care facility noted nationally for its excellence in the diagnosis and treatment of heart disease as well as disease and injury affecting the spine. The hospital provides comprehensive inpatient and outpatient care and a full-service Emergency Department that is also a nationally accredited Chest Pain Center and the only one on the North Shore. It serves patients from Tangipahoa, Washington and St. Tammany Parishes in Louisiana and from southern Mississippi counties.