

Louisiana Medical Center & Heart Hospital joins national campaign to raise awareness about peripheral arterial disease

One in 20 adults over age 50 has P.A.D., which raises risk of heart attack, stroke

(January 15, 2010 - Lacombe, La.) – For four months, Slidell resident Jan McAlister was sick with symptoms she believed were minor ailments. When she could no longer keep food down and had lost 50 lbs., she went to her doctor – only to find out she was suffering from a condition that was threatening her life: peripheral arterial disease (P.A.D.).

It's a condition many people at risk know little about. Drawing attention to the dangers of P.A.D. and helping raise public awareness about the symptoms are behind Louisiana Medical Center & Heart Hospital joining *Stay in Circulation*, a national campaign from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute aimed at helping adults over the age of 50 learn about P.A.D.

“My advice to other people is if you don't pay attention to and do something about the symptoms, you could die,” McAlister says. Though she'd been a long-time smoker, McAlister's feelings of nausea while she was sick led her to give up cigarettes. Once she found out from her doctor that smoking was a leading cause of P.A.D., she never lit up another cigarette. “And quit smoking. He said it affects your whole vascular system.”

P.A.D. is a common and treatable disease that is on the rise among midlife and older Americans. In the United States, more than 8 million Americans suffer from P.A.D., which develops when leg or other arteries to kidneys, intestines and brain become clogged with plaque—fatty deposits that limit blood flow to these organs. **Just like clogged arteries in the heart, clogged arteries in the peripheral circulation can be a marker for heart disease. Many of those with P.A.D. do not experience symptoms and often do not readily seek treatment. Timely detection and treatment of P.A.D. can restore mobility, decrease the risk of heart attack and stroke; and save lives.**

“P.A.D. is caused by the same risk factors that lead to heart disease. Those at risk include anyone over the age of 50, especially African Americans; those who smoke or who have smoked; and those who have diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, or a personal or family history of vascular disease, heart attack or stroke,” says David Kaplan, M.D., of Slidell. “Some people have no symptoms or, like Jan, they think it's something minor or a natural part of aging. The most common symptom is pain or cramping in the legs. Also, the clogged arteries are not always in your legs – they can be in any artery carrying blood from your heart to your head, arms, kidneys and stomach.”

Kaplan and another of the area's premier vascular surgeons, Philip Gardner, M.D., of Covington, are affiliated with the **Vascular Center at Louisiana Medical Center & Heart Hospital**, which brings focus to the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of P.A.D. and other vascular diseases. Both physicians will work with referral patients and their offices will also begin sponsoring screenings and education opportunities for local residents in support of *Stay in Circulation*.

As McAlister's vascular surgeon, Dr. Kaplan ran medical tests and scans to learn one of her arteries was 75 percent blocked, McAlister said. Kaplan put a stent in the blocked artery to her intestines

to open it to blood flow. “I started feeling differently four days after the first stent was put in. I started feeling hungry again,” she said, noting that she’s since back to her normal weight.

“We hope *Stay in Circulation* will raise public awareness about P.A.D. and the steps everyone can take to reduce their risk for this deadly disease,” said Donnie Frederic, LMCHH chief executive officer. “As **the region’s hospital that focuses on vascular treatment excellence**, LMCHH know the importance of raising awareness about P.A.D. Anything we can do to help our local residents stay in circulation and continue to enjoy life is worth the extra effort.”

To find out more about *Stay in Circulation*, visit nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/pad/.

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About Louisiana Medical Center & Heart Hospital

Opened in 2003 in the heart of St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana Medical Center & Heart Hospital is an acute care facility with special emphasis on the diagnosis and treatment of heart disease as well as disease and injury affecting the spine. The 137-bed hospital also provides comprehensive, general acute care inpatient and outpatient services. Recognized on a national and state level for quality outcomes and care, LMCHH serves patients from Tangipahoa, Washington and St. Tammany Parishes in Louisiana and the Mississippi Gulf Coast counties.