



**Weatherhead P.E.T. Center for Preventing and Reversing Atherosclerosis
The University of Texas-Houston Medical School and Memorial Hermann Hospital**

Heart News



Medicare Approves Payment for Some PET Scans

The Weatherhead PET Imaging Center is pleased to announce that after years of planning and negotiations, PET Imaging of the heart has finally been recognized by the Health Care Financing Administration for reimbursement in outpatients with established heart disease on Medicare. The staff of the Center has spent the last year obtaining approval as a Medicare provider, learning the rules and setting up the complicated processes for Medicare billing. Since private insurance carriers usually follow the guidelines set up by HCFA, other insurance reimbursement may become available for PET.

Unfortunately, Medicare's recent reimbursement approval does not include patients with only the risk factors for heart disease including family history, high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, or chest pain. These patients will have to continue to pay out of pocket for PET unless the PET scan establishes a diagnosis of coronary artery disease since Medicare coverage is only available in patients with an established diagnosis of coronary atherosclerosis. Non-Medicare patients will have to accept whatever their private insurance will reimburse.

Medicare coverage for PET acknowledges the importance of PET in the evaluation and management of heart disease patients. The coverage makes this important technology available to many people over the age of 65 who otherwise would not be able to afford it. However, as this shift to third party reimbursement takes place, it brings with it some necessary changes in our operational procedures.

In order to accommodate a higher volume of patients, Dr. Stefano Sdringola will become more active in performing and interpreting PET scans; also we have developed a more streamlined level of service for referring

continued on page 2 . . .



New Website

The Weatherhead PET Imaging Center is pleased to announce it's new website: www.healyourheart.info

It should serve as an additional place for information and updates from the PET Center.

Other helpful Nutrition and Exercise Websites:

www.nutritiondata.com helps you calculate the calories in your favorite recipes and has nutrition data on Fast Food items.

www.caloriesperhour.com helps you figure how many calories you burn with different activities

www.dietpower.com helps calculate calories in home recipes

<http://147.208.9.133/> helps you record daily meals and calculate the nutritional value.

One of America's Top Doctors

A popular consumer guide to the nation's most outstanding physicians has chosen 18 full-time faculty members from The University of Texas Medical School at Houston, as well as the institution's president, James T. Willerson M.D. to be included as America's Top Doctors. The 2003 edition of America's Top Doctors includes less than 1 percent of U.S. physicians.

For the second year in a row, K. Lance Gould, M.D. is listed as one of the top Doctors in America in Cardiology. Only physicians nominated and reviewed by their medical peers are eligible for recognition in America's Top Doctors. Evaluators based their assessment of these "top docs" on the individual's rigorous medical training, extensive clinical knowledge and experience, and further training in some specialties. These outstanding physicians meet not only these stringent general criteria, but also possess unique skills in their field.



Medicare continued . . .

physicians. The new color-coded pricing plan differentiates our levels of service and can be reviewed on our web site www.healyourheart.info. This plan provides the highest quality PET imaging of the heart at an affordable price, yet still offers the expertise of K. Lance Gould M.D. for follow-up preventive care.

As we incorporate these changes and continue to evolve, the primary mission of the Weatherhead PET Imaging Center remains the same. We will continue to be a unique, state of the art Imaging Center dedicated to the Prevention and Reversal of Heart Disease by combining the most advanced scientific technology and principles with individualized personal care.

The significance of C-reactive Protein

Several recent large studies have identified the C-reactive Protein (CRP), a marker for inflammation in the body, as an important predictor of heart attacks and strokes. These reports have stimulated lots of questions about who should have this simple blood test.

The CRP is a non-specific marker of inflammation in the body. It can be elevated with any inflammatory process in the body including an infection, injury, or arthritis that is not necessarily related to the heart or blood vessels. Secondly, although inflammation has been shown to be partly responsible for plaque rupture, there is no evidence that normalizing CRP alone will improve outcomes or save lives in heart disease. Furthermore, there is no specific treatment for lowering CRP other than treating the basic disease as we do with lifestyle and medications which also then prevents heart attacks and lowers CRP.

Asking for a CRP test makes sense if you feel you need an added incentive to work on the standard risk factors for heart disease, excess weight, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking or diabetes. An elevated CRP reading (3mg/liter or higher) might also be the deciding factor for drug treatment when cholesterol levels are borderline.

We have not measured CRP routinely in Dr. Gould's program since our usual guidelines include the most intense comprehensive treatment possible that reduces CRP and inflammation anyway. Our integrated program of daily aspirin, statins or other lipid lowering drugs, low fat food, exercise and weight loss stabilizes or partially reverses vascular disease, markedly reduces the risk of heart attack, improves heart blood flow and also reduces CRP levels.

Corner Pharmacy

Anticoagulation Therapy



This article will review the risks and benefits of warfarin, better known by its brand name, Coumadin, a common medication used to treat patients with heart disease. Coumadin is a strong anticoagulant medication that prevents blood clots by inhibiting the synthesis of Vitamin K dependent blood clotting factors.

Discovered in the 1940s, Coumadin was first used to prevent blood clots in patients after having a heart attack. President Eisenhower received the drug after his heart attack in 1954. Concern about its safety and side effects of bleeding reduced the drugs popularity for a number of years until the late 1980s when studies were published that established a clear benefit and safety for using the drug for certain medical conditions.

Today, Coumadin is used routinely in patients with a heart rhythm problem called atrial fibrillation to prevent stroke and in patients who receive mechanical heart valve replacements to prevent blood clot formation in the valve. Coumadin is also used to treat blood clots in the legs and to prevent clot formation in patients who have had a large heart attack.

Because of the potential side effect of bleeding, careful monitoring of the blood clotting ability must be done in patients taking Coumadin. A blood test called the Prothrombin time/INR must be done at least every 4-6 weeks or more frequently if the dosage is being adjusted. Patients should monitor themselves for any sign of excess bruising and bleeding such as bleeding gums, nosebleeds, or blood in the urine or stool and should report these symptoms immediately.

Leafy green vegetables and salads have high content of vitamin K that counteracts the effects of Coumadin. Therefore, some Coumadin directions warn against eating such foods. However, this advice to avoid green leafy vegetables is not correct since such foods are an important part of a heart healthy diet. The important point is to eat green leafy vegetables and salads daily as a steady habit and adjust the dose of Coumadin slightly higher to achieve the correct goals of the prothrombin time/INR. It is important such foods be continued daily since stopping them will result in greater effect of the Coumadin that could potentially lead to an increased risk of bleeding. On the other hand, if the Coumadin dose were adjusted for a diet without green leafy vegetable foods, then eating such foods would reduce the effect of the Coumadin and blood

continued on page 4



Heart Star

On the advice of his brother, Bob Casson came for a PET scan instead of arriving for his scheduled Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery. He wanted a second opinion; things were moving too quickly. Four episodes of feeling slightly short of breath and anxious had led Bob to get a physical exam at his doctor's office. A treadmill test was positive at that time and a further nuclear stress test was positive as well. A week later, cardiac catheterization was carried out and Mr. Casson was told he needed Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery in two days for a 90% blockage in one artery.

Unfortunately, like many patients Bob Casson had just been introduced to the standardized "Cardiac assembly line" treatment plan that is available in most medical facilities. But he stepped off. He wanted to be sure that the surgery was absolutely necessary, and wanted to know if alternative treatments were available for his individual case. After sitting down to discuss his PET scan results with Dr. Gould, Mr. Casson knew he was in the right place.

The PET scan results indicated that the blockages in Mr. Casson's arteries were not severe enough to limit the blood flow to his heart during stress conditions. This made it very unlikely that one of his arteries was 90% blocked. Further analysis of his angiogram film revealed that he had diffuse mild blockages in several arteries but the most severe was 50-60%. This case exemplifies many of the problems with conventional cardiac care. Inaccurate visual estimates of narrowings on coronary arteriograms frequently lead to invasive procedures and surgery.

These revascularization procedures are commonly done as the primary therapy for coronary heart disease, although studies show no improvement in long-term survival with bypass surgery when compared to medical treatment.

On the other hand, over 30 large well-done, published scientific studies have confirmed that cholesterol lowering substantially reduces heart attacks and the need for bypass surgery and balloon dilation. The added benefit and importance of other lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise have also been confirmed.

Under Dr. Gould's direction, Bob Casson became serious about his lifestyle. "I needed Dr. Gould's stern direction to help me pay attention to my life," says Casson. He was started on one medication for his high cholesterol and another specifically for his high triglyceride level. His LDL (bad cholesterol) went from 164 down to 70. Through better diet and blood pressure medications, his symptoms which had actually been caused by high blood pressure, were soon relieved.

Four years later, Bob continues the lifestyle changes he learned through the Weatherhead PET Imaging Program for Reversal of Heart Disease. At 56, he feels good and is out jogging every morning at 4:30 AM. He continues to challenge himself by tracking his weight, his running times, and his blood pressure. His dedication and success have earned him the title of Heart Star.





Coumadin continued. . .

clots might form in susceptible people. The best approach to this problem is to eat green leafy vegetables and salads daily, steadily and consistently in order to avoid variable effects of the Coumadin and to check the prothrombin time/INR regularly.

Living Healthy

Exercise-A Healthy Addiction



Many individuals find themselves addicted to exercise-with positive results. Years ago, scientists discovered a connection between endurance exercise and certain molecules released in the brain called endorphins. These molecules are naturally produced and seem to raise the body's pain threshold and produce feelings of euphoria. As little as a 20-

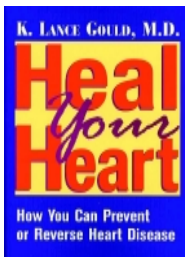
minute brisk walk will stimulate the brain to release these endorphins, and produce a desirable, addictive effect. If a few workouts are missed, you experience a form of withdrawal. Exercise seems to be one healthy addiction to latch onto.

Help Others by Making a Memorial Contribution

Patients frequently ask how a donation or contribution can be made in the memory of a good friend or family member lost to heart disease. Many people feel money given to fund research and education is more meaningful than flowers. To honor the memory of a loved one, memorial contributions can be made to:

The Weatherhead PET Center for Prevention and Reversal of Heart Disease
6431 Fannin Suite 4.256
Houston, TX 77030

Include the name and address of the person being honored; an acknowledgement will be sent to the family.



Available through

Rutgers University Press
100 Joyce Kilmer Ave.
Piscataway, NJ 08854

Or call: 800-446-9323



Dorothy's White Chili

3 chicken breasts (cut up)
1 tbsp. oregano
4 cans of Northern Beans
1 tbsp. cumin
7 c. chicken broth
2 tsp. chili powder
1 7oz. can of green chilies

5 cloves garlic
1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
1 large chopped onion
16 oz. can chopped tomatoes
Salt and pepper to taste
1 tbsp Tabasco Sauce (optional)

Sauté onions, put the rest of the ingredients in pot except chicken. Stir frequently for 20 minutes. Add chicken and simmer another 40 min, covered. Top each serving bowl with a dab of fat-free sour cream and reduced fat tortilla strips.

Food Suggestions

Jones Dairy Farm Lean Choice Sliced Canadian Style Bacon-3 slices/3 grams fat, 11 grams protein. Good chopped up in egg white omelet or in place of ham or bacon in recipes.



Blue Bunny Health Smart Frozen Ice Cream Bars –non-fat, 1 gram of protein and 70 calories. Orange and Vanilla Swirl and Raspberry and Vanilla Swirl flavors.

Barry's Bakery French Twists- sweet puffed pastry- available at Central Market. Only 2 grams of fat per twist, but be careful, hard to eat just one.

Gourmet Baker British Style toaster Muffins (Crumpets) Fat Free, Cholesterol Free, 82 cal/serving 3 gms protein.

PET News is published twice annually for the patients and friends of the Weatherhead PET Imaging Center for the Prevention and Reversal of Heart Disease. We welcome your story ideas, comments, and suggestions.

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