



CENTER FOR WOUND TREATMENT SAVES LIFE OF HERMITAGE MAN

When Bob Rossi found out in February 2004 that he needed open heart surgery, he never expected to end up as a wound care patient.

After an infection took hold in the incision from his open heart surgery, Mr. Rossi not only needed medical attention to save his heart, he also needed something to save his life.

That something was Vacuum Assisted Closure (VAC) Therapy, which was prescribed by Thomas Serena, MD, medical director of UPMC Horizon's Center for Wound Treatment. Manufactured by Kinetic Concepts International, VAC Therapy encourages healing by removing infection and fluids while drawing the wound together with localized negative pressure.

After undergoing a successful triple bypass surgery, Mr. Rossi's incision did not heal properly. An infection sent him back to the hospital four times and eventually his sternum needed to be removed.

According to Dr. Serena, most chest wounds heal with no complications, but occasionally he sees cases like Mr. Rossi's.

"He looked like he'd held a grenade to his chest. His whole sternum was exposed," Dr. Serena says. "When he breathed, you could see inside his chest."

His wife, Susan — who Mr. Rossi says was by his side throughout the ordeal — says nothing would hold the wound together. "The infection destroyed bone and skin ... stitches and staples wouldn't hold. There was nothing to hold. You could see his lungs and his heart; his chest was literally wide open."

To get the wound to heal, Dr. Serena had to explore several methods of wound treatment. First he prescribed VAC Therapy, which Mr. Rossi used 24 hours a day for about two months. VAC Therapy is a specialized wound dressing that involves hooking up a device that creates negative pressure in the region of the wound. A patient on VAC Therapy needs only a few dressing changes a week, Dr. Serena says.

Although being hooked up to a machine continuously for two months was inconvenient at times, Mr. Rossi says it was worth it. "I only had a 25 percent chance of making it," says Mr. Rossi. "The treatment saved my life — it cleared up the infection, and I haven't had one since."

After completing VAC Therapy, Dr. Serena started Mr. Rossi on Regranex, a gel that stimulates the growth of new tissues to aid in wound healing. Regranex is the first growth factor approved for use in wound patients, and Dr. Serena will soon begin clinical trials to test new growth factors in conjunction with the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

Mr. Rossi still has a large scar in the center of his chest, but the skin has healed and there is no sign of infection.

"He's doing very well, and he's out of danger now," Dr. Serena says.

"Thank God for wound care," Mrs. Rossi says. "Dr. Serena knows his stuff."