

Wave Editor Undergoes Free AngioScreen At PHC

By Brian Magoolaghan



Vascular Tech Charmont Young (right) applies blood pressure collar to Brian Magoolaghan, the associate editor of The Wave, as he undergoes a free AngioScreen at Peninsula Hospital Center. Cardio Tech Valerie Noel (left) uses an ultrasound device to scan Magoolaghan's carotid arteries.

Whew! I underwent a quick, easy and painless series of tests at Peninsula Hospital Center last week and found out that my current risk for heart attack and stroke is low. Best of all, I did it for free and without having to fill out a mountain of paperwork - and you can too.

Collectively called an AngioScreen, the tests I underwent are a non-invasive vascular screening that checked my heart rhythm, arteries, blood pressure, body mass index and my thyroid. I was screened at the hospital's invitation, because they want to draw attention to the fact that heart disease is the number one killer in the Rockaways and that they're providing these screenings free to anyone.

After I filled out a few forms, James Martinez, the administrative director of imaging services at PHC, brought me into an examination room, where I kicked off my shoes, untucked my shirt and reclined on the table. Vascular Tech Charmont Young and Cardio Tech Valerie Noel went to work performing the AngioScreen. They're the people who will find "it" if it's there, Martinez told me.

A cool jelly was applied to my neck so that ultrasound could scan my carotid arteries for cholesterol buildups called plaque. Have you seen that graphic anti-smoking public service announcement where the surgeon pulls fatty deposits out of the patient's neck? This test is designed to find a blockage like that before it gets so large.

"You wouldn't know you had a plaque in your artery because there are no symptoms," Martinez told me, "Until it's too late." His words resonated with me because I've seen family members suffer heart attacks and strokes that changed and sadly, shortened their lives.

Collars were applied to my legs and an ankle brachial index was performed to check for blockages in my legs, or peripheral artery disease. My pulse and blood pressure were taken with the collar and stethoscope method that we're all accustomed to.

All I had to do was keep still and quiet for a few minutes (movement can disrupt the ultrasound), which wasn't hard, since I was lying down in a room which was comfortably air conditioned. The testing was so passive that I noticed "Rocket Man" playing on the radio and my mind started to wander with the lyrics.

I was finished 15 to 20 minutes from when my pen hit the first form, and I was given a color printout with my results. All of my values were normal, which was a relief since I'm only in my late 20s. I was pleased with myself for taking a few minutes to follow the popular advice concerning early detection and preventative medicine. As Martinez reminded me, the people who avoid tests often wind up suffering the most.

I put on my shoes, tucked in my shirt and was finished. Since I listed my usual doctor in my forms, he'll automatically get a copy of the results. If the AngioScreen had detected something, I'd discuss treatment options (diet, exercise, medicine, surgery) with my doctor and perhaps undergo additional tests at PHC or another facility chosen in consultation with my doctor. Worst case scenario - say if they had found a significant blockage - I would have been admitted to the emergency room.

PHC started performing Angio- Screens in March, after purchasing the equipment with grant money from the state, according to Liz Sulik, PHC's director of external affairs. She and Martinez are confident the tests are saving lives through early detection. The hospital, which is the only one in the country doing AngioScreens free of charge, is applying for additional grants to keep the testing free, according to Sulik. Other facilities charge \$150 or more for the same procedure. So far, they've performed about 400 AngioScreens, "and since the population [in Rockaway] is over 100,000, we have a long way to go," said Sulik.

PHC administers AngioScreens on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. For more information call 718-734-3119.