

# New procedure allows surgeons to remove blood clots

Nearly 200,000 people die each year from Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) – a condition in which a blood clot forms inside a deep vein – and surgeons at St. Joseph Medical Center, Towson, are using a procedure that basically vacuums the clot right out of the body.

About 30 people were treated at St. Joseph with the new technology known as Angiojet last year and surgeons are thrilled with the results, said Dr. Mark Gonze, chief of vascular surgery at the hospital.

Angiojet is a minimally invasive procedure approved by the Food and Drug Administration last year “which removes the blood clot percutaneously through a three-millimeter incision,” said Dr. Gonze, a 42-year-old Catholic, Lutherville resident. “The machine injects a high-pressure saline solution into the blood vessel and then sucks the fluid out, along with the clot.”

Blood clots become life threatening if they break off and travel to the lungs or heart. Though people 60 and older are most at risk in developing DVT, the condition can strike anyone, Dr. Gonze said.

Pregnant women in their last trimester are five times more likely than non-pregnant women to develop it and people who frequently endure long periods of sitting or immobility – such as lengthy airplane flights, car rides or bed confinement after surgery or due to illness – are susceptible, he said.

“This procedure has allowed us to treat disease in a more timely manner,” Dr. Gonze said. “We’re also able to offer relief (from DVT caused swelling) to more patients who may not have been candidates before, because they suffered from other health issues.”

Before Angiojet vascular surgeons had few options in removing blood clots, other than major surgery that didn’t offer high rates of success and wasn’t offered to patients considered too ill for a lengthy operation, he said.

The technology has been used for several years in treating coronary circulation, but got its FDA approval for the removal of blood clots in 2006, Dr. Gonze said.

“We’ve seen a dramatic improvement in the patients who have needed this procedure,” he said. “This has helped their quality of life.”