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EXCELA HEALTH QUALITY INITIATIVE KEEPS DVT IN CHECK

GREENSBURG, PA, APRIL 7, 2010 ... No one wants to be hospitalized unless it's absolutely necessary. But sometimes that's an uncontrollable factor and if you're sick enough or need care, you want to know that you can count on getting the care you need in a manner that meets your expectations.

"Quality means different things to different people," commented Denise Addis, Chief Quality Officer for Excelsa Health. "At Excelsa Health, we strive to provide patients with quality care that is safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient and equitable. That's why our knowledgeable staff is always looking at processes and procedures to improve and enhance outcomes that will benefit patient care."

One area in which Excelsa Health has made great improvements statistically is in decreased numbers of patients developing Deep Vein Thrombosis, a complication sometimes resulting from a hospitalization or surgery.

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) refers to a blood clot embedded in one of the deep veins of the lower legs, thighs or pelvis. This clot is blocking blood circulation through veins which play a role in carrying blood from the lower body back to the heart. The blockage can cause pain, swelling, redness, warmth or fatigue in the affected leg.

Surgery and some medical conditions can increase the risk of DVT. According to David Kenney, MD, an Excelsa Health board-certified vascular surgeon, that is why it is important for all patients to be assessed for their risk of developing DVT prior to an operation. "Additionally, it is very important for hospitalized patients to get up and move

as soon as possible after surgery because without muscle movement, blood stagnates and has a tendency to clot,” he explained.

These deep blood clots have the potential to break off, or embolize and travel through the heart into the pulmonary system. They become lodged into the lung and can become life-threatening. This complication, referred to as a pulmonary embolism or PE, can lead to severe difficulty in breathing and even death, depending on the degree of blockage.

In the United States, about 2 million people a year develop deep vein thrombosis. Most of them are age 40 years or older. Statistics reveal that at least 650,000 patients die each year from PE, making it the third most common cause of death in the United States. PE is a major health problem and has been identified as the number one preventable cause of death in the hospitalized patient.

In addition to hospitalization or surgery, other factors impacting immobility such as prolonged travel or sitting, trauma to the leg, pregnancy or obesity can contribute to DVT. Additionally, individuals with cancer, those who smoke or are on certain medications (prolonged use of birth control pills, for example) are at increased risk to develop blood clots.

Diagnosis for DVT involves blood tests and a venous ultrasound. Anticoagulant medications are the standard treatment for DVT. “Heparin and Coumadin change proteins in the blood to prevent clots from forming.” stated Dr. Kenney. “They can’t dissolve the existing clot – your body may do that itself over time. However, these medications help to stop new clots from forming and old ones from getting any bigger.”

Pharmacological and mechanical approaches are available to try and prevent DVT and PE. At Excelsa Health, an extensive education program involving doctors, nurses and other health care providers has proven successful as a means to reduce patient risk and improve safety. As a result, complication rates of DVT/PE have been reduced significantly.

“By taking these measures, we have been more successfully able to screen for high risk patients and prophylactically treat medical and surgical patients more appropriately through established treatment protocols and processes,” emphasized Addis.

Dr. Kenney noted, “Excela Health is fully committed to these evidence-based practices. We will strive to increase public awareness concerning risk factors, symptoms and communication between patients and their physicians in support of the national campaign to further combat this serious complication.”