

Southcoast's Charlton Memorial is first hospital in southeastern Mass. to implant next-generation WATCHMAN FLX device

In late October, Dr. Adam Saltzman and Dr. Nitesh Sood successfully performed the first implants of the next-generation WATCHMAN FLX device on patients with atrial fibrillation in southeastern Massachusetts or Rhode Island, Southcoast Health officials announced.

Charlton Memorial is the first hospital in the region to offer and implant the WATCHMAN FLX Device, an alternative to the lifelong use of blood thinners for people with atrial fibrillation not caused by a heart valve problem, Southcoast physicians said.

Millions of Americans are thought to be affected by atrial fibrillation – an abnormal heart rhythm characterized by a rapid and irregular heartbeat. Individuals with atrial fibrillation have a greater risk of stroke than those with normal heart rhythms.

The WATCHMAN FLX closes off an area of the heart called the left atrial appendage to keep dangerous blood clots from entering the bloodstream and potentially causing a stroke. By sealing the area, the risk of stroke may be decreased, and, over time, patients may be able to stop taking blood thinner medications.

"The WATCHMAN FLX is a groundbreaking device," said Nitesh Sood, MD, Director of the Atrial Fibrillation Wellness Program at Southcoast Health's Center for Cardiovascular Care at

Charlton Memorial. “By offering this procedure, we are the leading hospital here for patients seeking advanced cardiac services, equivalent to major teaching hospitals.”

The next-generation technology has a new design and additional sizing to help treat more patients safely and effectively, in order to ensure the best long-term outcomes.

“What sets the new generation of WATCHMAN FLX apart is the expanded sizing options to match more patient anatomies and the fact that patients do not have to be placed on Coumadin, known as Warfarin, after the procedure,” says Adam Saltzman, MD, Medical Director of the Structural Heart Disease Program and Cardiac Catheterization Lab at Southcoast’s Center for Cardiovascular Care at Charlton Memorial. “Instead, patients can remain on whichever blood thinner they were on prior to the procedure – with a high probability of discontinuing the blood thinner after 45 days and a follow-up medical evaluation.”

In a clinical trial, 96% of people were able to stop taking blood thinners 45 days after implantation of the WATCHMAN FLX, officials said.

Southcoast Health has used the first-generation WATCHMAN for several years, implanting the device in 230 patients to date. The procedure is done once and does not require removal or replacement – remaining unseen from outside the body. The procedure is performed under general anesthesia and takes about an hour. Patients commonly stay in the hospital overnight and leave the next day.

Southcoast Health continues to prioritize medical advancements and research as a forerunning participant in the AMPLATZER Amulet LAA Occluder Trial, ASAP-T00 Trial, and the CHAMPION Trial, an international multi-center trial, which demonstrates the WATCHMAN FLX can be an up-front therapy for stroke prevention in AF. Engaging in these trials enables the

cardiovascular center to continue offering cutting-edge technology and clinical expertise.

“We strive for Southcoast Health to be this region’s premiere destination for cardiovascular care,” Dr. Saltzman said. “By offering the newest advancements in technology, like the WATCHMAN FLX device, we can offer our patients and the South Coast community a potentially life-changing stroke risk treatment option,”

For more information on the WATCHMAN FLX Device, please visit <https://www.southcoast.org/services/cardio-heart-vascular/the-watchman/>.