

Catching Your Breath

PleurX™ system offers relief for painful breathing



Rafael A. Alba Yunen, M.D., with PleurX patient Stella Strickland

When you take a deep breath, the surge of oxygen through your lungs relaxes and energizes your body. Now, imagine if that breath was restricted by pain, a cough or chest pressure. This discomfort is a regular experience for someone with pleural effusion, a buildup of fluid around the chest and lungs.

“Some patients can’t even complete a full sentence without stopping for an extra breath,” says Rafael A. Alba Yunen, M.D., pulmonologist at Southeast Georgia Physician Associates-Pulmonary Medicine, a strategic affiliate of the Health System. Dr. Alba Yunen is board-certified in internal medicine and critical care.

“Pleurae are thin, smooth membranes that cover the chest cavity and lungs,” explains Dr. Alba Yunen. “Pleural effusion is a fluid buildup around the membrane which sometimes, depending on the condition, can accumulate liters each day. A normal amount of fluid is 10 to 15 milliliters, about one-third to one-half ounce.”

Pleurae are supposed to glide past each other when you breathe, but excess fluid, experienced at times by those with cancer, heart disease or kidney problems, prevents the lungs from expanding normally.

Dr. Alba Yunen is providing relief and improving quality of life for some patients with pleural effusion using the PleurX™ drainage system, a relatively new outpatient procedure at Southeast Georgia Health System.

In a process that lasts about 15 minutes, he uses a real-time chest ultrasound to guide placement of a PleurX catheter. The thin, flexible tube is inserted through a small incision (less than a centimeter) in the chest and into the pleural cavity. A small portion of the tube remains outside the body, affixed by a bandage.

Most people who undergo this procedure return home the same day, supplied with drainage bottles and simple instructions. Generally, patients must drain the fluid every one or two days. The catheter stays in place until the fluid buildup subsides.

NOW Accepting New Patients

Southeast Georgia Physician Associates-Pulmonary Medicine

- 2500 Starling St., Suite 504, Brunswick
 - 2040 Dan Proctor Dr., Suite 120, St. Marys
 - 125 Peachtree St., Jesup
- 912-466-5504**

Most insurances, including Medicare and Medicaid, are accepted.



“This allows the patient to manage fluid buildup at home. By keeping them out of the hospital, we reduce treatment time and the cost of hospital visits,” explains Dr. Alba Yunen.

“People with recurrent effusions don’t always respond to conventional medical management with things like diuretics,” says Dr. Alba Yunen. “Some were coming to the hospital for an effusion drainage and returning a week later for another drainage.”

Risks associated with PleurX are few and a rare incidence, he says, among them bleeding, infection and blockage.

With the PleurX system, patients can manage fluid buildup on their own. “They save time and money and avoid the repeated needle sticks that could cause a collapsed lung,” adds Dr. Alba Yunen. “They can stay at home, they can shower, they can live normal lives.” •



PleurX bottle and patient kit