



Advance in heart surgery

DENICE BARNES

A NEW heart procedure offering an advance in stroke prevention was performed at Brisbane Waters Private Hospital in July.

Surgeon Brendan Gunalingam successfully implanted a Watchman device in patient Peter Lach, who suffered from atrial fibrillation.

In atrial fibrillation the upper chamber of the heart beats irregularly, causing blood clots to form, significantly increasing the risk of stroke

The Watchman device is a permanent implant designed to

close a pouch in the heart called the left atrial appendage and keep potentially harmful blood clots from entering the bloodstream.

Dr Gunalingam said the device presented an ideal alternative to blood thinning medication such as Warfarin.

“Warfarin is effective in reducing the risk of stroke, but may cause undesirable side effects such as bleeding, and requires the patient to have frequent blood tests,” he said.

“The Watchman will help to prevent a stroke in patients who have non-valvular atrial fibrillation and either cannot or would prefer not to be on Warfarin therapy long-term.”

Dr Gunalingam guided the

implant into Mr Lach's heart through a flexible catheter inserted through a vein in his upper leg, while Dr Maged William performed ultrasound imaging of the heart to guide the procedure. Once the device was in the correct position, it was released. Dr Gunalingam said Mr Lach had been progressing well since the surgery.

It was the first time this procedure had been performed on the Central Coast, and only the third time in NSW. With atrial fibrillation affecting one in four Australians over 40, Dr Gunalingam said he hoped more of his patients would benefit from the new technology.



Peter Lach with Brendan Gunalingam and the Watchman device. Inset: The device