

TO MEDIA:

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**EXCELA HEALTH CARDIOLOGISTS SURPASS 100 WATCHMAN™ IMPLANTS,
ELIMINATING PATIENTS' NEED FOR BLOOD THINNERS TO TREAT A-FIB**

GREENSBURG, PA, February 20, 2022 ...Fred Piper has a long history of heart issues that date to the mid-1980s when a high-pressure job exacerbated a massive heart attack that resulted in a quadruple bypass. While the 75-year-old Scottdale resident remains a passionate Tae Kwon Do instructor, he no longer needs to be concerned about the continued risks associated with long-term use of blood thinners which were prescribed to reduce his stroke risk given his history of atrial fibrillation.

During the February observance of National Heart Month, Piper is among more than 100 Excelsa Health patients celebrating their WATCHMAN™ Implant, one of several minimally invasive procedures performed by cardiovascular specialists in the Heart Center at Excelsa Health Westmoreland Hospital.

As many as 6 million Americans deal with atrial fibrillation, or A-fib – an irregular heartbeat that can cause complications like blood clots, stroke and heart failure. To guard against the likelihood of these occurring, doctors typically prescribe blood thinners, which come with their own risks, such as excessive or uncontrolled bleeding. The WATCHMAN™ implant offers an alternative to such medications.

During the hour-long procedure, the doctor inserts a small catheter in the patient's groin to implant the WATCHMAN™ device in the left atrial appendage without

any surgery or incisions. Once the device is in place, heart tissue will grow over the implant to seal off the appendage and close it off from circulation so clots can no longer be formed in the structure.

Often discharged within hours of the procedure, Excelsa Health patients will remain on blood thinners for 45 days. At that time, a cardiologist will perform a transesophageal echocardiogram or TEE to confirm that there's no blood flow around the device and no clot on the device. The patient will then be able to stop using blood thinners.

With the risk of clots being eliminated, so is the need for blood thinners.

“The biggest risk as A-fib progresses is the formation of a blood clot in the heart that can then travel to the brain and cause a stroke,” said Bassel Sayegh, MD, the Excelsa Health electrophysiologist who deemed Piper an appropriate candidate for the procedure.

While anti-clotting medications have been around for more than a century, the WATCHMAN™ has been available in the United States since 2015. The WATCHMAN technology is the most studied and implanted left atrial appendage device in the world and has been used to treat more than 150,000 patients in 75 countries.

“Most patients have no problems taking blood thinners. Unfortunately, some develop significant bleeding with these medications,” added Excelsa Health electrophysiologist Sandeep Arora, MD, FHRS, CCDS. “In the worst cases, patients with gastrointestinal bleeding can end up in the hospital with severe anemia and require multiple blood transfusions. We'd be very concerned about keeping them on blood thinners.”

Such is the case for Dr. Arora's patient, Larry Carleton of Hempfield Township, who has a history of bleeding ulcers along with A-fib. Now age 75, when this Vietnam War veteran learned his condition was deemed appropriate for WATCHMAN, he was ecstatic. “Not only do I feel better overall, I'm so excited about the upcoming fishing season. Now that I'm off blood thinners, I don't have that added worry of getting a cut and bleeding while doing something I enjoy.”

To learn more about WATCHMAN, visit www.excelahealth.org.