Commitment to Our Community

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Solving a Painful Medical Mystery

Dominican provides a game-changing procedure for women who often suffer from pelvic pain for years without accurate diagnosis or treatment.

Erin Johnson had been dealing with chronic pelvic pain since she was 16 years old. Over the years, she underwent many CT scans and X-rays, and received as many different diagnoses.

“It was a powerful ache in my lower abdominal and back area that would get worse throughout the day,” says Erin.

The mysterious pain worsened in her twenties after she had children, ultimately resulting in the removal of her gall bladder. Still, the pain persisted.

“I loved going on runs, but the pain would get worse when I’d start running,” Erin adds.

In 2016, her gynecologist suggested that Pelvic Congestion Syndrome (PCS) may be the culprit. After some research, Erin found the similarities between the symptoms of PCS and her own were uncanny. She was advised to consult with an interventional radiologist.

As a registered nurse in Interventional Radiology at Dominican Hospital, that part was easy. She sought guidance from her colleague, Juan Rodriguez, MD, director of interventional radiology at Dominican Hospital.

“I conducted a CT scan on Erin, and noted that some of the veins in her abdomen were bigger than they should be, a red flag for Pelvic Congestion Syndrome,” Dr. Rodriguez explains. “PCS is often the result of weakened veins that can no longer support proper fluid flow. Gravity takes over and fluid is improperly redirected, causing it to collect in the lower abdomen and produce intense pain.”

PCS can affect women of all ages and backgrounds. The symptoms of PCS typically worsen as a woman ages and after pregnancy, and there is often a correlation between the syndrome and varicose veins in the legs.

Dr. Rodriguez performed ovarian vein embolization to treat Erin’s PCS. The minimally invasive procedure closes off faulty veins so they can no longer enlarge with blood and cause pain. Patients are in the hospital for no more than two or three hours and can resume normal activity almost immediately. Dominican Hospital is the only medical facility offering this procedure in Santa Cruz County.

“The effects of the treatment should be immediate,” Dr. Rodriguez says. “For the 60 percent of women who often suffer from pelvic pain for years without accurate diagnosis or treatment, this procedure is a game changer.”

“The very next day I went for a run and had no pain at all,” Erin shares. “I’ve lived through decades of strict medication and diet regimens. I’ve had countless vacations and family events ruined by pain. And now that pain is gone. I’m so thankful to Dr. Rodriguez.”

To learn more about Dominican Hospital’s Interventional Radiology services, call 831.462.7716.

Let your doctor know if you have any of these symptoms of pelvic congestion syndrome:

- Pain and pressure in the lower abdomen and back that intensifies as the day progresses.
- Is aggravated by physical activity.
- Is relieved when you lay down.
- A history of or predisposition for varicose veins.
- Intense pain during intercourse or menstruation.