

### Innovation aids liver cancer patients

Milford Hospital pioneers a new tumor treatment

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MILFORD - Willie Allen was dying.

The elderly West Haven man had been diagnosed with liver cancer, which is usually fatal within three months. He already had surgery, the most radical treatment available but the cancer had recurred.

That's when Allen found his way to Milford Hospital, and to an innovative procedure done by Dr. Mel Rosenblatt, an interventional radiologist.

Rosenblatt, assisted by his advanced-practice nurse, Catherine Burdge, permanently blocked one of the veins supplying blood to Allen's liver. That starved the tumor, causing it to die.

The procedure, called liver tumor embolization, also removed several of the lesions on Allen's liver, making him eligible for a transplant that may save his life.

The technique Rosenblatt and Burdge use is found at many large teaching hospitals. Its availability at Milford hospital, a small "community" health care center, represents an alternative for area patients, and a change for Rosenblatt as well.

The former doctor of interventional radiology at both Yale-New Haven and Memorial Sloan-Kettering hospitals, the West Chester resident still maintains a New York City practice.

His patients come from all across the region and as far away as Bermuda for the procedure, and at first they maybe skeptical of Milford Hospital, Rosenblatt said.

"When we schedule patients here, they'll say 'Where?' But where they see how clean and new it is, and how attentive the staff is, they are happy.

# CONNECTICUT IMAGE

## GUIDED SURGERY

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Milford Hospital spokesman Ken Warren said the imageguided surgery only seems incongruous at the small hospital to people who haven't been in for a while.

"We're doing lots of things that are innovative, that you wouldn't expect at a community hospital," he said.

Rosenblatt agreed. When the hospital underwent an expansion and modernization several years ago, officials offered to design a suite for this practice, tailored to his needs.

Although his patients usually only stay in the hospital a few days after the embolization, the next few weeks are uncomfortable for them, the doctor said.

The procedure kills the tumor, causing the body's immune system to reject it, bringing on nausea, inflammation and other symptoms, he said.

Sometimes chemotherapy drugs are also administered, through the same thin needle that delivers the plastic pellets that seal off the vein. Radio waves can also "burn" the remaining cells at the edge of the tumor, Rosenblatt said.

The technique, though it can extend the life and ease the pain of liver cancer patients, is not a cure, the doctor said.

He and Burdge used the same method to treat varicose veins, uterine fibroids and other abnormalities. Embolization creates a blockage in the blood vessel that is medically useful, Rosenblatt said.

In varicose veins, for example, the embolus shuts off a valve in the surface veins that is allowing blood to flow the wrong way.

The procedure will, in a few years, make the most common treatment of vein stripping as quaint as applying leeches, the surgeon said.

Varicose veins are the largest part of his caseload, the Springfield, Mass., native said, while liver tumors count for between 10 and 20 percent.

Burdge, an advanced practice nurse, assists in the operating room and does a lot of the patient education. An advanced practice nurse has further training after becoming a registered nurse.

"I love this job and this practice" Burdge said. "I've learned a lot from doctor Rosenblatt and he is very supportive of my work."