

Leeches and hyperbaric treatments used in breast surgery



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Veterans receive oxygen treatment. (WPTV)

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL--In 2003 Myrna Loiterstein was diagnosed with breast cancer. After she had a mastectomy to remove the cancer the surgeon who was going to perform a breast reconstruction noticed that her remaining tissue was congested with blood and had turned blue.

Myrna Loiterstein, survivor: "He felt that I had to keep the tissue with the blood circulating and oxygen in to the tissue."

Myrna's doctor knew that he had to do something to remove the old dead blood cells, and increase the circulation of new blood to bring oxygen into the tissues.

Dr. Hilton Becker, Board Certified Plastic Surgeon: "Sometimes the flaps become congested and the blood builds up in the tissue and doesn't drain sufficiently, so we use the age old medical leeches that are placed on the skin flap. And they will actually suck up the old blood."

Today when you see Myrna riding her bike through the neighborhood it's hard to believe what she went through.

Myrna: "This is gross but...I had leeches put all over... I would sit there in his office for maybe 2 or 3 hours, whatever it took. And trust me, I didn't feel anything."

Dr. Becker: "The other thing the leech does is it injects an anticoagulant into the tissue, because it wants to suck the blood out. To get the blood out it has to liquidize the blood and that's a great benefit to the flap that is threatened."

Myrna: "I guess after 3 or 4 days Dr. Becker said everything the leeches did their job I had oxygen everything was circulating."

So, does Myrna think the leeches saved her breast tissue and allowed her to have reconstruction?

Myrna: "Without a doubt."

For more information contact the Susan G. Komen For the Cure help line: 1-800-IM-AWARE OR 1-800-462-9273