November 9, 2020

Dear Colleague:

I would like to make you aware of a disease that affects many patients in our patient population. A recent analysis of aneurysmal disease in Santa Barbara County revealed that we likely have an underdiagnosed prevalence of abdominal aortic aneurysms (AAAs). An AAA is a balloon-like bulge in the aorta. Weakening of the artery wall can lead to a rupture (burst) or dissection. A rupture leads to dangerous exsanguination and has a high morbidity and mortality.

AAAs are the third leading cause of sudden death in males over 60 in the United States.  The disease is generally asymptomatic. Smoking is the number one risk factor for both aneurysm growth and aneurysm rupture. Men who are smokers or who have a history of tobacco use are at particularly high risk as is any patient with a family history of AAA. 95% of aneurysms can be treated if detected prior to rupture. Early detection is vital and saves lives. If an AAA is suspected, then an ultrasound is the optimal screening tool and is both inexpensive and noninvasive. This is almost always covered by insurance.

This is why I am writing to you. Please consider the prevalence and risk factors for AAAs:

Male (current or former) smokers over 60 years old

Any patient over 65 with a family history of AAA

Previous heart bypass or coronary artery disease

Hypercholesterolemia

Hypertension

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

I have enclosed a flier that helps characterize this disease. Please share this with your patients and staff.  I would welcome a phone call to discuss any patient concerns you have or if you would like me to send you more fliers.

Respectfully,

Kevin Casey, MD, FACS

Santa Barbara Vascular Specialists

kcasey@sbvascularspecialists.com

619.208.5531 (cell)