

St. Luke's Surgeon First in Area with Breakthrough Sleep Apnea Treatment

The Inspire Option Offers Sleep Apnea Patients A Convenient Treatment Without Cpap Machines.

By Sam Kennedy

BETHLEHEM - Patients who have suffered with sleep apnea and have difficulty using or maintaining CPAP machines now have a new option. Inspire is a breakthrough sleep apnea treatment that works inside the body while the patient sleeps by monitoring the patient's breathing and delivering mild stimulation to open the airway.

The stimulation allows the patient to breathe normally and sleep peacefully. Using a remote, the patient simply turns on Inspire before falling asleep and off upon waking. There is no mask or hose – just a simple remote.

Dr. Jarrod Keeler, chief of surgery at the Allentown Campus of the St. Luke's University Health Network, is first in the area who performs this FDA-approved procedure, which works inside the body to treat the cause of sleep apnea with the click of a button. The procedure to place a small device inside the body is typically completed in same-day surgery and involves a few days of at-home recovery. Pain or discomfort is minimal, and patients overwhelmingly report dramatically positive results within a relatively brief period following the surgery.

"Patients frequently tell me that they appreciate finally not having to deal with any struggles with the CPAP machine while reaping all the benefits," he said.

One of those patients is Laura Baylo, a 58-year-old dental assistant in Bethlehem who suffered with sleep apnea and its effects since she was in her thirties. "I had it for years without even realizing it," she said. "I was waking up constantly, feeling out of breath, almost like I was suffocating."

A sleep study confirmed a diagnosis of severe sleep apnea, and Baylo started treating it with a CPAP machine. "I'd say, in the beginning, it worked for me for a hot minute," she said. "But I found the machine very difficult. It never fit right; it would actually wake me up with distracting sounds.... let's just say that it could never be my best friend."

When her cardiologist told her about the Inspire sleep apnea option, she said she readily embraced the idea. "After researching it, I was totally on board," she said. "I'm not afraid of surgery, not afraid of going under. I just went for it and I'm so glad I did."

Her brief surgery went well, and she experienced little discomfort after it. She was back to work in a few days and has been enjoying the benefits of deep, healthy sleep for more than a year now. "I never realized how much sleep apnea affected my health until I started feeling so much better," she said. "For me, it was so worth having this procedure, and that's what I would tell anyone who is considering it. It's a no-brainer."

Having an impact on public health

Keeler, who was just named a Surgeon of Excellence by Inspire (the first in the Lehigh Valley and the only surgeon in the region), came by an interest in this type of surgery while studying Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery fellowship at the Stanford University School of Medicine.

"Stanford is sort of a mecca in the world of sleep surgery," he said, "and my exposure to that really helped me appreciate the deep impact sleep plays in public health and safety in this country. People who suffer with sleep apnea and sleep deprivation are at much greater risk for heart attacks, strokes, high blood pressure, diabetes, car accidents....the list goes on. It's an area where we can really have a deep impact on not just quantity of life, but quality of life."

After learning more about the procedure and the level of interest among residents of the Lehigh Valley, Keeler began working with Inspire and the St. Luke's network to offer the technology locally. The first Inspire implant surgery was successfully completed at St. Luke's in September of 2020, and Keeler has performed nearly 100 since then. His oldest patient was 88, and his youngest was only 29. "He is the picture of health but has sleep apnea and was struggling, just like so many others who are unable to tolerate CPAP," Keeler said of his young patient.

Not everyone with sleep apnea is a good candidate. A diagnosis of moderate to severe sleep apnea is required, and the patient cannot be significantly overweight.

Some patients also express a concern about the implant's compatibility with MRIs, but Keeler said that a recent FDA approval ensures that all the devices are fully compatible with magnetic resonance imaging. Nearly all insurances in the Lehigh Valley now cover Inspire therapy, and Keeler notes that the device has a typical battery life of more than a decade.

To learn more about the Inspire therapy, if you qualify, and what the next steps would be for you or your loved one, call Dr. Keeler's office at (610) 628-1225).



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