

Beware the vein 'silent' condition

Doctors say
clot serious
and preventable

By **CHRIS LEONARD**
Staff Writer

WOOSTER — Claiming the lives of about 300,000 Americans a year, deep vein thrombosis has become a serious public health concern.

It's been made more evident by the surgeon general's call to action in September, and now a local doctor is urging residents to be aware of the few signs and symptoms.

DVT is a blood clot in a vein, commonly in the leg or thigh, according to Dr. Larry Stern, medical director of the Vein Specialty Center at Wooster Community Hospital. It can typically lead to swelling, pain, skin discoloration and blocking blood flow, he added.

"If those blood clots move through the blood stream to the lungs, that can be a fatal condition," he said, if not immediately fatal.

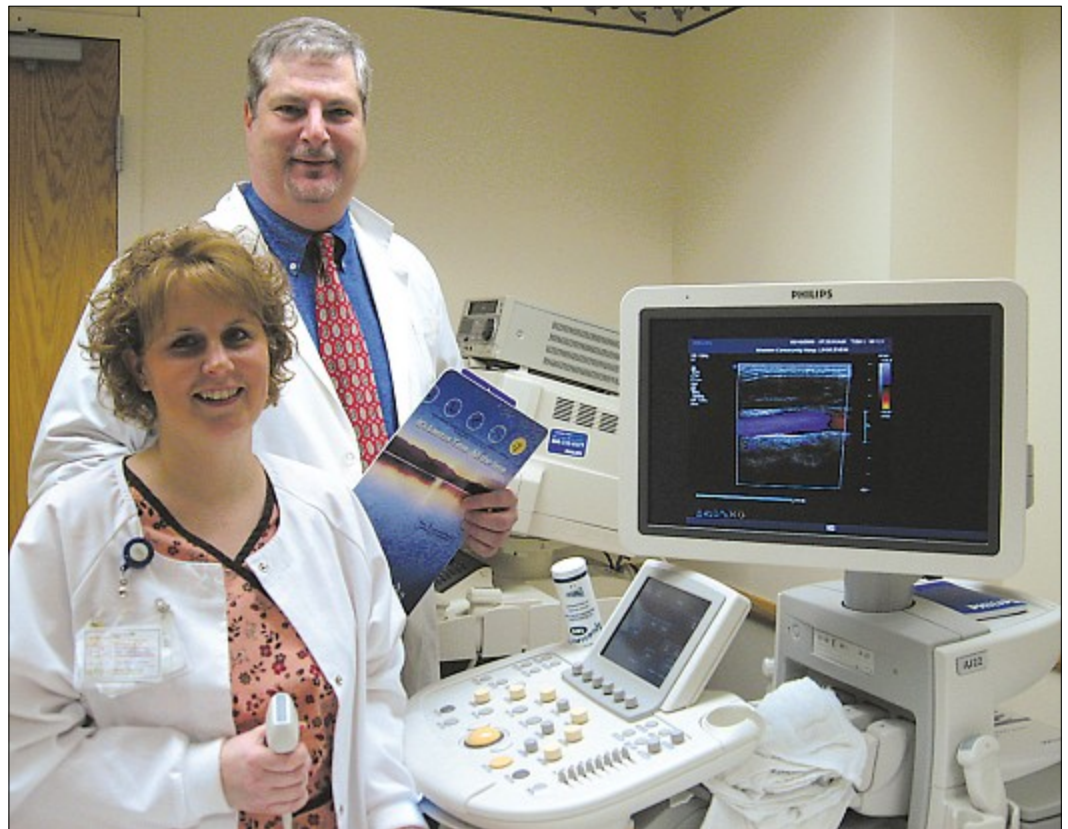
Blood clots in the lungs are known as pulmonary embolisms, and 10 percent of people die within the first hour of blood clots getting into the lungs if they don't get proper treatment, Stern said.

Dr. Steven K. Galson, acting surgeon general, stated previously researchers have found in most cases, DVT and pulmonary embolisms develop in people who have an inherited blood-clotting disorder or experience a triggering event.

"Being hospitalized or confined to bed rest, having major surgery, suffering a trauma or traveling for several hours can increase a person's risk of deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism," Galson said.

And that 300,000?

"That's more than breast cancer, AIDS and automobile accidents combined," Stern said.



Chris Leonard photo

Dr. Larry Stern, medical director of the Vein Specialty Center, and Jennifer Yoder, registered vascular technologist, use ultrasound technology to find blood clots in veins.

Galson called DVT and pulmonary embolisms "silent" conditions that can occur suddenly without symptoms.

"But we have made a lot of progress in understanding how these disorders develop and how to prevent, diagnose and treat them. It's time to put this knowledge into action," he said.

Stern said if patients have unexplained sudden leg pain, swelling or have a family history of embolisms and DVT, they should be aware of the risks of blood clots.

If left untreated, other symptoms like long-term swelling, leg pain and the development of varicose veins could occur.

When patients come in to see a doctor, and if they suspect possible blood clots, they will try to have the patients get an ultrasound the same day

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performed by vascular technologists, Stern said.

Ultrasound uses sound waves to view the veins in the body and determine the location and severity of a clot.

Two kinds of treatment are available to reduce clotting: injectable blood thinners, typically used for four or five days of treatment, and Coumadin, a blood thinner used for longer treatments, like six to 12 months, according to Stern.

However, he called DVT one of the most preventable conditions.

Preventative measures include staying active, quitting smoking, not sitting or standing for prolonged periods of time and even purchasing medical-grade stockings.

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