

A new centre for excellence could offer hope to hundreds of sufferers

The new HEART PROCEDURE that will change lives

PEOPLE suffering from severe narrowed coronary arteries are being offered fresh hope thanks to a new specialist centre being set up in Dublin's Mater Private Hospital. Dr Colm Hanratty, a cardiologist specialising in coronary intervention who

By **MAEVE QUIGLEY**

previously worked in Belfast, is setting up the centre to help those in Ireland who are suffering a poor quality of life due to angina and other complications of narrowed arteries.

And he is hoping to help the hundreds of people who have been told that nothing more can be done for them in terms of improving their quality of life.

'Basically I worked in Belfast all my career up until April this year when I moved to the Mater Private. Belfast is probably the best cardiac centre in

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I couldn't CLIMB the stairs ... now I can cycle 300kms

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Europe just because of the advanced technologies and interventions used and we wanted to try and set that up in Dublin.

'And where I specialise is treating people who have already been classified as hopeless cases, those who have been told there is nothing more that can be done for them.'

Narrowing of the arteries can cause heart attacks and stroke but many of those living with the condition to have a poor quality of life due to the fact that even the slightest levels of

exertion are exhausting to them.

The techniques Dr Hanratty uses were perfected by himself and Dr Simon Walsh in Belfast in an effort to treat those who had a poor quality of life due to heart disease.

'I developed the techniques in Belfast with Simon Walsh, We were at the forefront of developing them and have broadcast our operations all over the world in an effort to try and teach other operators in other countries the skillset needed.

'The idea now is to try and replicate



that from Belfast and to set up a centre in Dublin where patients who have been told that they can't be treated or shouldn't be treated have access to the skillset.'

THE operation is a delicate form of angioplasty where a stent with a small inflatable balloon is passed through an artery to reopen it.

'It is a form of angioplasty where you use a small balloon after crossing the narrowed or blocked artery with a guide wire, then you put in a stent,' says Dr Hanratty.

'Most of the cases of angioplasty that are done the artery is open which is relatively straightforward. Where I specialise is whenever the artery is not open. It is a matter of opening the artery up and using advanced skill and techniques to do that.'

The balloon is directed up to the heart and into a coronary artery until its tip reaches a narrow or blocked section.

It is then gently inflated widening the artery and allowing the blood to flow more easily.

A stent — which is a small tube of stainless steel mesh, about 15 - 30 millimetres in length — is already in place on another balloon. As the balloon is inflated, the stent expands opening the artery. The balloon is let down and removed, leaving the stent in place.

'It is angioplasty in complex patients,' Dr Hanratty says. 'The population we are dealing with nowadays is getting older and sicker. Many patients have either had a previous bypass that is now failing or they aren't suitable for a bypass as this would not be in their best interests.'

'If you are 82 or 83 and get admitted to hospital with narrowed arteries a bypass is not the way to treat that. But with the advanced techniques we now have, we can treat this with stents.'

One of those who has been treated by Dr Hanratty is Andrew Idle, an Englishman who lives in Spain but who travelled to Dublin to get the intervention just five weeks ago.

He previously had a heart bypass operation but when it started to fail he began to worry about his future.

'I'm 65 now and back in 2007 I was

competing in Iron Man competitions,' Andrew explains. 'I was doing one in France when I felt pains in my chest and down my arm and I knew there was something really wrong and that if I kept going I might be a goner completely.'

'Those were my first symptoms. I was fit and fitness was our business at the time but doctors in Spain told me I hadn't had a heart attack. So I flew back to England for tests and they told me I needed a triple bypass and I had that done in Malaga Hospital.'

ALTHOUGH Andrew is incredibly fit, he previously worked in the fish and chip industry which he says contributed to his narrow arteries.

'The original doctor told me they wouldn't have to see me again for ten years after the bypass so I assumed then that they were saying it could last ten years or longer depending on the person's lifestyle,' he says.

But 18 months ago Andrew started to feel like something was going wrong again.

'I started getting tightness in my chest again and I knew things weren't right,' he explains.

He had further tests which showed there was a narrowing in an artery.

'My cardiologist told me last November he could see a narrowing of the artery but to what extent we didn't know until June when I had an angiogram.'

He underwent a procedure to try to open the blockage in Spain but it failed and that was when he turned to Dr Hanratty for help.

'Colm had been over to Spain doing one of our triathlon camps and I had been talking to him about the bypass operation. So I decided to give him a call and ask for his opinion as I knew he specialised in this sort of thing.'

'He recommended four or five guys to me but I came to the conclusion that I wanted him to do it if it was at all possible.'

For a few months before he came to Dublin, Andrew's situation in Malaga where he lives with his wife and two of his five daughters had become critical. At 65 he thought his life was over, having gone from being super fit to unable to climb the stairs.

'I was writing notes saying things like 'this is where the life insurance



policy is' as I really thought I was going to die. For the last couple of months before I went to Dublin I could hardly climb the stairs without needing a sit down as the closure of the artery came on quite rapidly.'

But Andrew's idea to be treated in Dublin was one that gave him his life back.

'Five weeks ago today I had the operation after flying to Dublin and quarantining in a hotel for 14 days,' Andrew says.

'I wanted to make sure I didn't get Covid as the operation wouldn't have gone ahead then but happily everything went well. I was awake for the procedure.'

Now back at home in Malaga, Andrew also has his life back. And even though he is still in recovery he is getting back to fitness already.

'Last week I did 300 kms on the bike and I swam 6kms. It's steady but it's getting there,' he says.

'It is quite unbelievable how I feel now. They told me it would take about four to five weeks to heal inside because they are clearing the old tubes out with roids so there's a fair amount of bruising inside but I feel absolutely great. It is just a matter now of getting back to fitness but before I had this treatment done I thought I was going to die.'

Andrew's previous levels of fitness undoubtedly helped his fast recovery but Dr Hanratty says quality of life for many is improved by this procedure. 'In Northern Ireland last year there were 250 of these complex cardiac procedures done in Belfast while in the Republic of Ireland there would have been less than 50,' says Dr Hanratty.

'Given the population here is four times the size of Northern Ireland, where are all these patients?'

'So all these Andys are in Dublin, Cork and Galway and they are being told they can't be treated or it's not possible to treat and they are living with significant damage to their quality of life and actually at a significant cost to the health-care system as they are coming in and out of hospital they have complications and they are sick

people. It's not a benign situation to be in.

'If you have narrowed arteries or blocked arteries you don't get blood to the heart muscle. I relieve that blockage and that improves the blood flow to the heart muscle which translates mainly in an improvement to your quality of life but also reduces hospitalisation, health care utilisation so you aren't going up and down to hospital with angina and getting admitted.'

'The Mater Private realised there was a need for this kind of treatment here and so the plan is to set up a national referral centre based in Dublin.'

Andrew's situation is also not uncommon for those who previously had a bypass.

'A bypass works for a certain length of time and then the graft — particularly the venous parts of the graft — start misbehaving. This unfortunately is a common story in Ireland too,' says Dr Hanratty.

Like any procedure, it is not without risk although these are low. 'The risks of the procedures are relatively low,' Dr Hanratty says. 'They are slightly more risky than an ordinary procedure but for Andy the chances of a complication with another bypass, for example, because he had a bypass before would have been around five to ten per cent.

'With the techniques we are using, the chances of a complication are one in one thousand.'

There are few people across all of Ireland and the UK with the level of skill required to carry out the procedure but Dr Hanratty now wants to engage other clinicians and train them up so that more can be treated.

'The quality of life for a patient living with a complex cardiac issue is poor but there are now ways of treating this. For people like Andy your quality of life can be restored.

'For those who have been given a poor prognosis, I want to get the message out there that there are other options.'

■ For more information on the procedure please contact the Mater Private on 01 8858888.



90

Thousand Irish people
have heart failure

14

Percentage of people
over 65 with angina



Feeling
better:
Andrew Idle
(left) with
Dr Colm
Hanratty

