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Keeping pace with technology

South Tyneside heart patients are among the first in the North East to be given a new type of pacemaker, which allows doctors to monitor them remotely at all times, anywhere in the world.

Doctors at South Tyneside District Hospital have implanted the devices, which transmit alerts if any problem arises, in the first two patients and Consultant Cardiologist Dr Mickey Jachuck said more would be implanted in selected patients in the future.

The first recipient, retired Coal Board train driver Brian Marley, 70, of South Shields, said: "I think it's fantastic: I was always panting for breath before but now I'm as fit as a butcher's dog. A week after I had it fitted, my wife, Maureen, and I celebrated our golden wedding anniversary with a cruise and it was very reassuring to know that they could check for any problems while I was away."

Pacemakers, which are implanted in the chest and send regular electrical pulses that help keep the heart beating regularly, can greatly improve quality of life. During 2012-13 in England, more than 40,000 people had one fitted. Last year, about 80 were fitted in patients in South Tyneside.

Dr Jachuck said: "We are delighted that South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust is able to offer patients the benefit of this latest technology. With a traditional pacemaker, the patient has to attend for regular check-ups to allow us to retrieve the information on it and check how well the pacemaker and the patient's heart is working.

"With the new pacemaker, all of the information collected is continuously transmitted wirelessly via a small device, which the patient keeps with them, and we can do the routine checks without them having to come to the department. Crucially, by sending alerts, it also allows us to detect any problems early - well before the patients themselves may be aware of anything being wrong."

Pacemakers are most commonly used to treat slow heart rhythms but Dr Jachuck said the Trust would be looking into the possibility of using the wireless pacemaker to pick up other hearth rhythm problems.

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Pictured above: The photograph shows Patient Brian Marley with clinical physiologist Tracey Finkle and Consultant Cardiologist Dr Mickey Jachuck

Issued on behalf of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust by Kay Jordan

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