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Quickening the pace

Heart patients arriving as emergencies at South Tyneside District Hospital can now be fitted with potentially life-saving pacemakers in under an hour.

Several patients have so far benefited from this treatment and more are expected to follow. The new development is the latest progression in South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's pacemaker service, which will soon mark its 10th anniversary.

Consultant Cardiologist Dr Mickey Jachuck said: "Whilst the majority of patients who need treatment with a pacemaker are stable and can have their implant planned, occasionally some cases present in A&E as emergencies needing immediate or urgent intervention. Previously, it took time to identify and prepare an operating theatre for such cases but this year we opened our newly-refurbished cardiac facility, containing the very latest imaging and monitoring equipment, and all cardiac procedures, including pacemaker implants, can be performed there. As a result, we are now able to fit a pacemaker within an hour of a patient coming in to A&E. This is a fantastic achievement which is, undoubtedly, saving patients' lives."

Great-grandfather Bob Raine, 89, of Boldon, was brought in to the hospital by ambulance as an emergency after he collapsed and hit his head. Following initial concern over possible concussion, attention swiftly moved to his heart and it was decided that he needed a new pacemaker, which was fitted by the cardiologists within 40 minutes.

Mr Raine said: "I think what they did was marvellous and I really appreciate it." In the last decade, more than 600 patients have had pacemakers implanted at the District Hospital. Before the service was introduced, South Tyneside patients had to travel to the Freeman Hospital, Newcastle, or James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough, for their procedures.

Consultant Cardiologist Dr Abdul Nasser said: "When the service was first proposed, there was a lot of discussion around the viability of providing it locally in a small, general hospital but our Trust decided to press ahead and support it. We had to train up staff from scratch; set up pathways for a completely new procedure; find physical space and establish follow-up clinics. We can pride ourselves on not only maintaining this local service but providing it



safely. The people of South Tyneside have benefited greatly because the rate of implants has increased so more are getting the treatment they need and, also, they don't have to travel far for their procedure and follow-up appointments."

The increasing numbers of patients having their pacemaker procedure performed locally has coincided with major advances in cardiac device technology, with a wider range of 'wireless' implantable devices available that can be remotely monitored. These enable important information about patients' heart rhythms and the function of the device to be transmitted automatically to the cardiology team, without the need for the patient to visit the hospital.
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Pictured above: Bob Raine, who had a pacemaker fitted within 40 minutes, with Consultant Cardiologists Dr Mickey Jachuck and Dr Abdul Nasser and cardiac physiologists Colin Shek and Alison Jones.

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

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