

Foam Sclerotherapy

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Since humans adopted an upright position for walking they have suffered varicose veins in the lower limbs, one of the world's most frequent maladies - affecting approximately 25% of the world population - 2 ½ million of Cuba's 11 million inhabitants. It's important to know that the eradication of varicose veins eliminates one of the main causes of death on the planet.

Thus did Dr. Antonio Suárez Cabrera, head of the Freyre de Andrade Surgical Teaching Hospital's Angiology and Vascular Surgery Department, begin the interesting conversation about sclerotherapy, the injection of a chemical irritant into a vein to sclerose (harden) it.

"Until a short time ago, treatment of varicose veins in the lower extremities was a choice between surgery and sclerotherapy; with the first used for complicated and large varicose veins, while the second was mainly reserved for small-calibre veins or as a complement to surgery. However, problems of toxicity and dosage prevented using sclerotherapy for large veins.

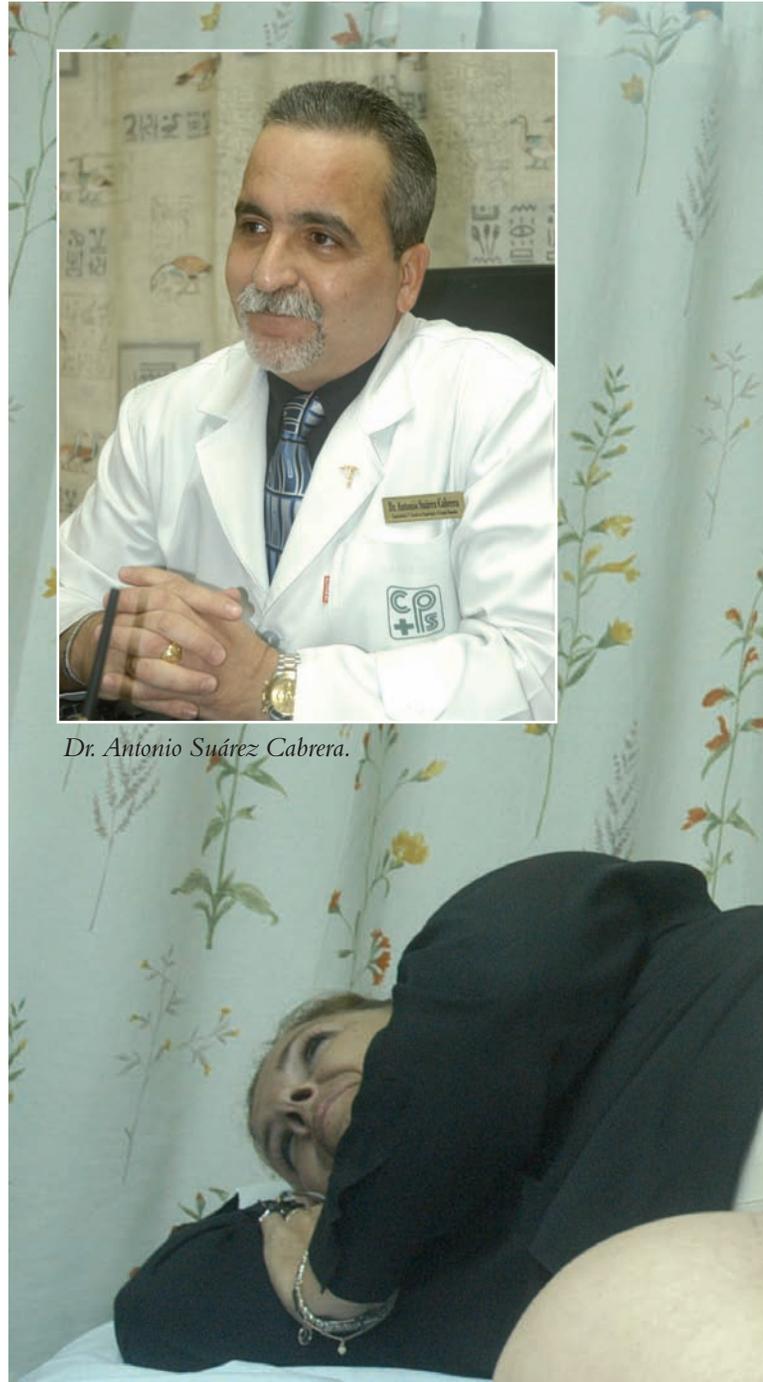
"In Cuba the new procedure using a foam variant stemmed from the 2006 XII Pan-American Phlebology and Lymphology Congress, when Mexican scientists, led by Prof. Valente Guerrero González and collaborators, expounded on their experiences for their Cuban colleagues."

When was foam sclerotherapy first applied in Cuba?

"On June 26, 2006 I carried out this technique in the Angiology Department of our hospital, and it was the first time in Cuba a greater saphenous varicose vein with a surgical indication was eliminated by this method.

"At that time we treated a 52-year-old female patient who panicked in the operating room; she had been hospitalized on two occasions but couldn't be operated upon because her blood pressure went up.

"I cannot fail to mention that for that first experience I was accompanied by Drs. Cristina Ariosa and Luis J. Polanco, with the fundamental support of university graduate Addis Márquez who, besides being my wife, was my collaborator in the first 168 cases."



Dr. Antonio Suárez Cabrera.

Exactly what is the process?

"It consists of injecting a medicated substance in the form of foam into the vein, which causes the closure of the vein's lumen to produce an irritation in its wall, that is, the varicose vein turns into a fibrous cord, which the organism identifies as something foreign and for which it later triggers the mechanisms for its elimination."

What are the advantages of foam sclerotherapy?

"Foam treatment is, in my opinion, an effective treatment for varicose veins in the lower limbs.



"It's a painless procedure that barely produces annoyance to the patient, it eliminates varicose veins that with conventional surgery would be difficult to remove, it lacks the inconveniences of surgery and is done as an out-patient routine, without anaesthesia or prolonged rest. When completed, an elastic bandage is put on the patient and they can return home.

Are there any contraindications?

"It should not be carried out on patients suffering from arterial insufficiency, acute venous thrombosis, or unrecannulated

postphlebotic syndrome, collagen diseases, coagulopathic carriers, nor diagnosed neoplastic processes.

"Nor on pregnant women and one must wait at least six months after finishing breast-feeding."

What is the prognosis?

"That will depend on each case in particular, as a definitive treatment curing chronic venous insufficiency doesn't exist. Therefore, regardless of the treatment that is applied, the use of elastic support and abiding by the measures mentioned constitute



Catching the vein.



Blood pressure is registered with the Doppler .

the basis of success in the control of the disease and the only way to fight against the appearance of new varicose veins after treatment."

Who is most prone to varicose veins?

"Orthostatism (an upright position) favours chronic venous insufficiency, but it is more frequent in women, those who are overweight and those who spend prolonged periods standing."

What are the methods of prevention?

"Among the dietary and postural hygienic measures recommended are: avoiding overweight, practicing a sport (walking, swimming), protecting oneself from overheating, using cold water baths on the legs, avoiding constipation and use of extremely tight clothing and not using oral birth-control pills."

"Also important is using shoes with a 3.4 cm heel instead of high heels or flat shoes, and slightly raising the foot of the bed."

Once corrected, can varicose veins reappear?

"Yes, as long as the predisposing factors exist, the possibility of a relapse is highly probable. We cannot forget that chronic venous insufficiency does not have a definitive treatment allowing total recuperation of the damage produced in the venous system. The use of elastic stockings is perhaps the most important part of treatment."

You said that it is one of the main causes of death in the world. Why?

"Varicose veins can have several complications, including rupture and consequent bleeding beneath the skin, which causes very



After the injection.



Final bandage.

intense pain and is known as stoning syndrome. If the rupture reaches the skin, the patient can lose great quantities of blood. Hyperpigmentation of the skin of the lower third of the leg, as well as repeated inflammatory processes easily lead to the formation of ulcers, which is another of the more frequent and fearful complications."

"But the most dangerous and perhaps the most little known is venous thromboembolism in any of its forms (deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism), a process characterized by coagulation of blood inside the veins (thrombosis) with resulting displacement and attachment in the lung of all or a fragment of the cruor (embolism)."



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In 2006, Cuba applied foam sclerotherapy based on experiences acquired with practice and exchanges with internationally renowned specialists. Two years later, in 2008, the first National Sclerotherapy Workshop was held in Havana with professors from different countries. A pioneer of this technique in Cuba, Dr. Antonio Suárez Cabrera, professor and head of the Freyre de Andrade Surgical Teaching Hospital's Angiology and Vascular Surgery Department, participated in the phlebology congress "México 2008" celebrated in Acapulco, Mexico, where he demonstrated Cuba's experience with this technique. More than 4 000 operations of this type have been performed in Cuba with excellent results. Today, one-month Clinical Phlebology and Foam Sclerotherapy courses are offered by the Freyre de Andrade Surgical Teaching Hospital and the Health Ministry of Cuba for the training of doctors from other countries. Those interested should contact: flebiologiafa@infomed.sld.cu



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