

HEALTH NETWORK PROGRAM QUELLS FEAR OF SURGERY 02/01/00

We recently had a direct TV system installed and I am well pleased with it for several reasons.

The principal reason is the availability of the Fox News Network. Several sources lauded it as being more even-handed and balanced than the other three networks accessible by antenna systems in this area.

After viewing it for only a short while, I concur and no longer bother with any of the other three. I agree with Fox's motto: "We Report - You Decide." If they only had a local network than everything would be beautiful.

The Health network is another feature I like with the new system. Those of us who have reached the golden years know there are many pressing reasons to be acutely aware of health issues and solutions.

"The Operation" is one of the most insightful and interesting segments. It features actual operations on every part of the human anatomy. After watching several I would not have the same apprehension and fear I once would have had should I have to undergo surgery. Present day medical technology and expertise is truly miraculous.

I have watched several open heart procedures from bypasses to valve replacements. One of the most fascinating was a measure developed by a little known Brazilian surgeon. With few modern facilities and several destitute patients in dire need of relief, he came up with a revolutionary procedure.

The patients had enlarged hearts and were close to complete failure and death. He actually reduced the size of the patient's heart by removing a section. It was a move that flew in the faces of all accepted medical maneuvers at the time.

I first became aware of his work from conventional television special outlining his work. Recently, I saw the actual operation on a patient in this country where he was assisted by a surgeon from the US who wanted to gain first-hand experience.

Another recent episode was especially important to me. It was an operation to remove a tumor from a thyroid gland that was seriously affecting the patient's activities. My father went through the same procedure in 1938. It was a groundbreaking procedure in those days.

It has been gratifying to witness the miracle work on the horrible facial deformities of

youngsters from third world countries. All of the costs and skills are donated by caring doctors.

Several recent operations, typical of many I have been following, have been undergone by acquaintances of mine. These, combined with the examples I have given, have piqued my curiosity and graphically illustrate how much more fortunate we present-day citizens are than our forbearers.

The most important aspect in this whole issue is adherence to a premise put forth by our family doctor in the late 50s and early 60s. He was Dr. Eugene Retzbach, a prominent New York City physician who retired here in Old Forge. His sage advice was, "The very best medicine is preventive medicine."

Many of our most virulent disease are totally preventable with proper care and annual physical examinations.

I have learned one comforting fact from all I have accounted above – there is much less to worry about in any operation than I ever thought possible. One old friend who just had triple bypass explained it this way: "I was home in four days. It was not much worse than a visit to the dentist."

No matter what your age, keep active, use it or lose it. Don't smoke, eat right and get regular checkups.

The moral to this story for we older folks is to live long enough to be a burden for your children and get even.