

Sunday mornings are for ... groundbreaking surgeries at AGH

One Sunday morning, Sara O., a surgical physician assistant at AHN Allegheny General Hospital, was on call.

Her morning quickly changed when she was notified that she needed to come in for an emergency cardiac case, an aortic dissection. Aortic dissections are life-threatening emergencies that involve a tear within the aorta, the main artery responsible for carrying oxygen-rich blood from the heart to the rest of the body.

Was this the aortic dissection case they were waiting for? If the criteria was met, the cardiac surgeons, Sara, and the rest of the operating room team could be working on a case that would change how aortic dissections are treated.

And that's exactly what happened.

The cardiac surgeons and their OR team were the first in Pennsylvania, and among the first in the country, to successfully implant a new device that has been clinically proven to treat aortic dissections safely and effectively, dramatically improving survival rates and minimizing the chance for subsequent aortic tears.

"It was really cool to see, especially for the first time," Sara said. "The surgeons have been trained on the backend on how to use this device. They're able to guide the fellow as the first assistant, and the PA as the second assistant, and instruct us on what our role is and how to make it go smoothly."

One of the things Sara felt was most interesting about being in that surgery was being able to see the procedure unfold.

"You come into these emergent situations and see how the surgeon is able to evaluate the situation and just make decisions on the fly as to whether this device is the right thing to use or we should use another material. I think it's really exciting to see things playing out in real time."

Sara chose AGH to start her career as a PA because of remarkable opportunities just like this surgery.

"You are using newer technology, doing newer procedures, and dealing with sicker patients. I find that very interesting, exciting, and rewarding."

As a PA, Sara enjoys being part of the team that gets to help from start to finish.

"It helps me continue my education," Sara said. "I get to continuously see new things used and see how it helps patients."

Some people would be upset to get called in on Sunday morning to work. But not Sara.

"I'm not upset, but rather, I'm excited to get called in on a Sunday because I know that this is an emergency situation," said Sara. "It is the ability to help patients in those situations and be a part of a team."

Learn more about the impact of this surgery: <https://bit.ly/40ao1Jt>