



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Virginia Mason First on West Coast to Offer Isolated Limb Infusion** Team Medicine approach benefits specialized treatment for metastatic melanoma

**SEATTLE – (June 24, 2010)** – Virginia Mason Medical Center will become the first medical center on the West Coast to offer a specialized procedure called isolated limb infusion for the treatment of metastatic melanoma, the most dangerous and deadly form of skin cancer. A team of surgeons and interventional radiologists will perform the first procedure at Virginia Mason Hospital Tuesday, June 29.

Isolated limb infusion (ILI) is used for a type of metastatic melanoma called in-transit metastases. This form of melanoma spreads along lymphatic vessels in the skin which forms nodules either in the skin or under the skin away from the primary melanoma site. Surgical removal is difficult because there are too many nodules to remove and they will almost always recur. ILI can be used to deliver high dose chemotherapy drugs directly to an arm or leg. The flow of blood to and from the limb is temporarily stopped with a tourniquet, and the drugs are put directly into the blood of the limb for up to 90 minutes. Isolating the limb prevents high doses of chemotherapy drugs from affecting other organs. The procedure is performed in the operating room with the patient under general anesthesia. At the end of the procedure, the drugs are flushed out of the limb and circulation is returned to normal. The entire procedure takes about two to three hours.

First introduced in the mid-1950s as isolated limb perfusion and then later made less complex using minimally invasive techniques by surgeons in Sydney, Australia in the 1990s, the isolated limb infusion procedure is rare and highly specialized due to the surgical skill requirements of complex vascular surgery and interventional radiology. Virginia Mason surgeons Kevin Beshlian, MD, a plastic and reconstructive surgeon specializing in melanoma, and dual-trained vascular surgeon and interventional radiologist Ellen Farrokhi, MD, will lead the team.

"This is Team Medicine at its best, bringing multiple physicians together for one patient," said Beshlian. "We're excited to offer this highly specialized care at Virginia Mason."

"As a melanoma survivor, I know what our patients are going through and their anxiety of having few treatment options for severe cases of metastatic melanoma," said Farrokhi. "Being able to offer this unique therapy close to home is exciting and rewarding."

Until now, patients with melanoma needing isolated limb infusion were referred to other cancer centers around the country, such as M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Texas or Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. Now patients from throughout the Western United States will be able to stay closer to home for this life-saving therapy.

Several thousand cases of this specialized procedure have been done in the United States and Europe over the past 30 years. More than 80 percent of patients who receive the treatment have a good response where their melanoma tumor nodules shrink significantly or disappear. If necessary, the procedure can be administered more than once.

According to the American Cancer Society, 68,720 new cases of melanoma will result in 8,650 deaths annually. Melanoma can occur anywhere on the skin, but is more common on the chest, back, head and neck in men, and arms and legs in women. Typically, the primary therapy for melanoma is surgical removal. Other treatment includes chemotherapy, immunotherapy or radiation.

For more information, patients and referring physicians may call Susan "Sam" Vetto, BSN, RN, melanoma and cutaneous oncology nurse specialist, at (206) 341-1720 or visit [www.VirginiaMason.org/ILI](http://www.VirginiaMason.org/ILI).

**About Virginia Mason Medical Center**

Virginia Mason Medical Center, founded in 1920, is a non-profit comprehensive regional health care system in Seattle that combines a primary and specialty care group practice of more than 440 physicians with a 336-bed acute-care hospital. Virginia Mason operates a network of clinics throughout the Puget Sound area; manages Bailey-Boushay House, a nursing residence and Chronic Care Management program for people living with HIV and AIDS; and operates Benaroya Research Institute at Virginia Mason, internationally recognized in autoimmune disease research. Virginia Mason is known for applying manufacturing principles to health care to improve quality and patient safety. For more information, visit [VirginiaMason.org](http://VirginiaMason.org) or [Facebook/VMcares](https://www.facebook.com/VMcares) or follow @VirginiaMason on Twitter.

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