

Wake up the possibilities: AMH sleep lab helps Alton native prior to surgery

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ALTON - When **Rodney Gillson** traveled to St. Louis from his home in northeast Minnesota for a long-awaited surgery, he found out there was still one roadblock he had to overcome. Fortunately, Alton Memorial Hospital, where he was born 59 years ago, and its Sleep Diagnostic Center came to his rescue.

Gillson was scheduled for outpatient surgery to relieve chronic back pain and sciatica issues.

“When I went in for pre-op testing, the surgery center told me I would need a sleep study before they could do the procedure,” Gillson said. “I had several symptoms associated with sleep apnea, including being a larger person, having a large neck, my age, high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes.”

Thanks to a friend who was aware of Alton Memorial Hospital’s Sleep Diagnostic Center, Gillson was able to reach the center’s manager, Penny Krause, who is also manager of Respiratory Services and Neurodiagnostics. Penny immediately arranged for Gillson to visit the Sleep Lab the next day.

The team, including Vanessa Harvey, a registered sleep technologist, and Julie Hodge, a secretary for the Sleep Lab, helped arrange a sleep study to get Gillson back on the surgery center’s schedule.

“We were able to get an order from his physician, work with his insurance to get pre-certified and had him in within a few days to do the sleep study,” Krause says. “With everyone’s help, a four- to eight-week process was done in a week.”

Gillson underwent the sleep study overnight in the center’s private rooms, located on the first floor of the AMH SmithWing. The Sleep Diagnostic Center has specially trained polysomnographer technicians who study patients’ sleep patterns. These technologists work closely with neurologist Dr. Ajitesh Rai and pulmonologist Dr. Dani Tazbaz, both certified in Sleep Medicine, who read the results of the sleep studies and recommend treatment for patients.

Having a sleep study done prior to surgery is not unusual, says Harvey.

“A sleep study should be a best practice for any surgical patient with symptoms associated with sleep apnea or other sleep conditions,” she adds.

Gillson, who grew up in the Alton-Godfrey area, has been living in Northeast Minnesota since 1980 with his wife, LeeAnn Lewis Gillson, also an Alton native, and their three children, where they operate a seasonal fishing resort. Although he is a busy person with a demanding job during the season, he says sleep apnea didn’t seem like an issue to him.

But following the study, Gillson was diagnosed with sleep apnea and prescribed a CPAP machine to help keep the airways open while he sleeps. Four days later, he was able to have his non-invasive spinal surgery and says he feels great today.

“The entire staff was just unbelievable at Alton Memorial,” Gillson said. “Julie and I had an immediate bond because we were in the same graduating class from Alton High. She just took the bull by the horns to help get things through. Everyone was so nice and concerned about me. They were also extremely professional.”

Gillson says he can honestly say a sleep study is a “great experience” and has made a real difference in how he feels. He also learned that proper rest could help in improving chronic illnesses, like his high blood pressure and diabetes.

“I know people might be afraid of sleep studies because of the wires, sleeping in a strange place and not wanting a CPAP, but it’s amazing what they can tell you,” he says. “Although I didn’t feel like I had symptoms of sleep apnea, now that I’ve been diagnosed and sleep with the CPAP machine I feel more rested, I don’t have afternoon drowsiness and my energy level is improved.

“Without the sleep lab at Alton Memorial Hospital, I don’t know how long I would have waited for my surgery. They are amazing people and they really care.”

The Sleep Diagnostic Center at Alton Memorial Hospital offers state-of-the-art equipment in rooms designed to provide comfort and peace of mind during a sleep study. The center provides testing for a wide range of sleep conditions. These include:

- *Loud snoring*
- *Sleep apnea*
- *Daytime sleepiness*
- *Restless sleep*
- *Morning headaches*
- *Trouble awakening*

- *Early awakening*
- *Insomnia*
- *Restless Leg Syndrome*

For more information, call 618-463-7545 or visit:

[www.altonmemorial](http://www.altonmemorialhospital.org/Medical-Services/Sleep-Disorders-Center)hospital.org/Medical-Services/Sleep-Disorders-Center