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## Local woman overcomes odds

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Shelly and Allyson Orr of Mentone. Shelly was successfully treated for multiple brain aneurysms. (Courtesy photo)

### Doctor performs complex 12-hour surgery and induces three-day coma

When you first speak with Shelly Orr, 29, of Mentone her infectious laugh and incredible personality would make you think she is the luckiest woman in the world.

However, Orr has a half shaven head and several scars to prove that her life has been anything but easy.

Earlier this year, Orr, mother of a 9-year-old daughter and massage therapist at a local chiropractor's office, was diagnosed and treated for six aneurysms and an Arteriovenous Malformation/Fistula, an abnormal connection between veins and arteries that causes fatigue, dizziness and confusion that plagues 300,000 Americans.

Beginning at age 9, Orr felt the carotid artery in her neck pulsating as if she had run a marathon. After seeing several physicians, she was often told that it was "nothing to worry about and that it would subside."

Year after year, she continued to feel more tired and fatigued with no explanation as to why she could not get dressed without being totally exhausted. Despite her fatigue and dizziness, she did not display the typical symptoms of someone with an aneurysm or AVM/AVF.

When she turned 18 her symptoms began to progress and experienced frequent fainting and a large lump in her neck that she described as a scene from the movie "Aliens."

After becoming pregnant, her symptoms were further exacerbated and she began to experience intense headaches and neck

pain. Her family friends called her lazy and a hypochondriac since doctors could not find anything wrong, but Orr knew deep inside that her problems were very real.

"Despite what my doctors said. I knew there was something terribly wrong," Orr said. "I always felt so tired and the lump in my neck was definitely not normal."

Finally, Orr consulted a cardiologist who immediately had her undergo several tests, which led to the discovery of her having abnormal neck vessels and a large vascular lesion in her brain. The 3D-cerebral angiogram test also showed at least four cerebral aneurysms on the right side of her brain with one being extremely large with a Vein of Galen AVF malformation.

Following the tests, she was referred to neurosurgeon Dr. Ali Mesiwala of the Southern California Center for Neuroscience in Spine in Pomona.

Mesiwala recommended immediate surgery which required two separate operations.

The first surgery, on March 10, involved Mesiwala utilizing the latest 3D navigation technology that would allow him to safely expose her carotid artery in the neck and the vessels in her brain through a skull base - her orbit, or bone around eye, and zygoma, or cheekbone, were disassembled and put back together - approach designed to "clip off" a total of six aneurysms as well as several arterial feeders to her malformation. Mesiwala induced a coma for three days to allow Orr to sufficiently heal. One week

later, she underwent a second brain surgery to clip off the additional feeding vessels.

"Shelly's case was one of the most complex cases I have ever seen," Mesiwala said. "We found that the AVM/AVF was essentially stealing or shunting blood from brain to the malformation. Thankfully, we were able to safely and effectively treat Shelly without any complications."

Since the surgery, Orr has noticed significant improvement in her overall health as well as her long standing and severe speech impediment. More importantly, she is excited to have the energy to play with her daughter again.

"I am just so thankful for Dr. Mesiwala and his team because they have given me back my life," Orr said. "It is incredible to be able to play with my daughter and make up for lost time."