



**Full of drive: Veteran TV reporter Rex Haw, now with WA Police, says he feels pretty lucky after two episodes with aneurysms.**

Picture: Steve Ferrier

# Quiet killer foiled by pain and luck

A scan on an old back injury may have saved the life of veteran television reporter Rex Haw. Haw was involved in two serious car crashes during his 38-year reporting career — one of which left him in a coma for six months — producing a legacy of chronic back pain.

But when he began to feel intense pain radiating from what felt like his kidneys four years ago, he went to Joondalup Hospital. He was sent home with a suspected kidney infection but awoke the next day in agony and unable to get out of bed.

A CT scan of his spine ordered by his GP came back clear but did note a 6cm abdominal aortic aneurysm requiring urgent surgery.

Haw drove himself to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital after receiving the news, amazing the emergency room staff who were awaiting his ambulance's arrival.

"They said, 'You only had a 2 per cent chance of coming to hospital alive, now you are here you have a 5 per cent chance of surviving'," Haw recalls.

Another scan of the aneurysm showed that it was only 3.5cm and Haw was sent home with the comforting knowledge that it would grow only one millimetre a year; giving him 20 years before it would reach 5.5cm, the size at which surgery is recommended.

"I have known and lived with the thought that I have an aneurysm," Haw says. "But I wasn't worried about it as long as I was monitoring it, even though you have got a huge big bubble of blood bouncing around in there."

A year later, he was back and booked in for immediate surgery after the aneurysm grew 2cm in less than 12 months, a phenomenon Haw partially credits to some emergency chiropractic work while on holiday in Melbourne.

"He started twisting my back and jumping on me and then said, 'You're lucky you don't have an aneurysm because I couldn't have done that if you did'," Haw says.

The minimally invasive surgery took about 40 minutes and within six weeks Haw was back at work reporting and playing competitive pennant golf.

"I was as good as gold," he says.

It was on the golf course one day about two years later that Haw started to feel tingling in his calf. He visited a suburban weekend clinic and was told he had an inflamed tendon and to take some painkillers.

An ultrasound later revealed he had a blood clot in his leg and a stent was inserted the same day into an aneurysm which had formed in the popliteal artery behind his knee.

"They are associated with abdominal aortic aneurysms," Haw's vascular surgeon Brendan Stanley says. "So once someone has had an AAA repair, we look out for popliteal aneurysms."

Haw's father died of cardiovascular disease at the age of 74, and he takes medication to lower his cholesterol levels but has never suffered from high blood pressure.

Despite ticking most of the boxes for abdominal aortic aneurysm risk, Haw realises how lucky he is to be alive. "Aneurysm is a bit of a silent killer," he says. "I feel pretty lucky because many aneurysms are only diagnosed when you are looking for something else."

Haw moved to his current position of media and public affairs special projects officer with WA Police three years ago and still has a golf handicap of 13. A wayward golf ball struck his abdomen directly over his newly inserted stent soon after his AAA repair.

"It probably has a golf-ball-sized dent in it now," he says.