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## Revolutionary heart procedure a first for Alberta

EDMONTON – For the first time in Alberta, cardiac specialists are performing a revolutionary heart procedure that offers new hope to patients unable to cope with open and invasive surgery.

Three patients have already undergone transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI) since the first procedure in Edmonton in mid-May. All three operations were successful, with two patients back home within just two days.

The procedure is used to treat patients with severe aortic stenosis, which blocks the aortic valve of the heart and is deadly if left untreated.

TAVI involves inserting a manufactured valve the size of a quarter into the heart, replacing a patient's failing aortic valve. The procedure is less intrusive than open heart surgery, with the valve delivered through a catheter compared to open surgery through the chest.

It gives new hope to patients for whom traditional open heart surgery is deemed too risky, due to pre-existing medical conditions.

“Before, with a lot of these high-risk heart patients, you would have to turn them down for surgery or you would proceed with extremely high-risk surgery in the hopes you would get them through,” says Dr. Steven Meyer, a cardiac surgeon with AHS and the University of Alberta.

“Some were successful; some weren't. It would put a huge strain on the patient, a huge strain on their families, and a huge strain on the health-care system.

“This procedure means we can help those patients, giving them quantity of life and, most importantly, quality of life. We're not just making people live longer but we're making them feel better.”

A cardiac team is expected to begin TAVI procedures at Calgary's Foothills Medical Centre within months.

An interventional cardiologist with expertise in the TAVI procedure will join the cardiac team in mid-June. He was trained in Calgary and spent a year in Chicago before being recruited by AHS and the University of Calgary.

Dr. Todd Anderson, Department Head of Cardiac Sciences at Foothills Medical Centre and University of Calgary and the Director of Libin Cardiovascular Institute of Alberta, says the procedure should be available to patients in Calgary by the fall.

“It is giving hope to those who don’t have hope or quality of life,” says Dr. Anderson.

In the past, Alberta heart patients deemed too risky for open heart surgery received no treatment or had to travel to St. Paul’s Hospital in Vancouver for the TAVI procedure. Otherwise, they faced a grim prognosis of less than two years before their heart failed them.

Dr. Benjamin Tyrrell, an interventional cardiologist at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, has seen first-hand the effects of aortic stenosis on patients unable to have open heart surgery.

“The TAVI program will provide a paradigm shift in how we treat high-risk patients,” Dr. Tyrrell says. “TAVI is an innovative procedure that provides an option to a patient who once had no options.”

Performing TAVI procedures in Alberta is a huge benefit to patients, says Dr. Dylan Taylor, Co-Site Medical Director at the University of Alberta Hospital, Stollery Children’s Hospital and Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute.

“Having to travel to get this treatment was a major barrier for these patients. It was something many patients just could not do,” says Dr. Taylor. “Without this, they wouldn’t be able to enjoy anything that resembles a normal lifestyle, with normal activities.”

The procedure can be done under general anesthesia and takes between two and four hours. Open heart surgery takes a minimum of three to five hours. Most patients can leave hospital after three or four days, half the time they would spend in hospital following open heart surgery.

The program is co-directed by Dr. Robert Welsh (Director, Adult Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory at the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute) and Dr. Steven Meyer (Cardiac Surgeon, Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute) with a team of experts from both the Royal Alexandra Hospital and the Mazankowski, including Dr. Benjamin Tyrrell (Interventional Cardiologist, Royal Alexandra Hospital), Dr. Miriam Shanks (Echocardiologist) and Dr. Dylan Taylor (Adult Congenital and Structural Heart Disease).

The new Alberta program is operating under the guidance of Dr. John Webb, of St. Paul’s Hospital, in Vancouver, B.C.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.7 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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