

Saving Lives with Trans Aortic Valve Replacement

On November 25, 2013, a multi-disciplinary heart team at the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) successfully performed its first two transcatheter aortic valve replacements (TAVR) for two Veteran patients who needed, but who were high risk for, open-heart surgery.

One year and three months later, the team continues to successfully perform TAVR procedures for patients who are not candidates for traditional cardiothoracic surgery.

“We have now performed TAVR on 41 patients with excellent results,” says Chief of Interventional Cardiology Kendrick Shunk, MD. “We have certainly saved some lives.”

An estimated 300,000 Americans are diagnosed each year with severe aortic stenosis, a condition where the aortic valve doesn't open fully, decreasing blood flow from the heart to the body.

Without treatment, approximately half of the people who have systematic aortic stenosis die within an average of two years after symptoms begin.

Traditional surgery involves replacing the aortic valve through open-heart surgery, requiring a

large incision through the chest. For many patients and the elderly or frail, the traditional surgery is too high-risk, and they wouldn't survive.

That's why TAVR is so important. It can save the lives of those who would otherwise have no other treatment options.

TAVR is less invasive (the entry point is a small incision in the leg), and cardiopulmonary bypass is usually not needed.



“This procedure is as good as traditional surgery and recovery is much faster. Hospitalization averages only 2-4 days after the procedure and then usually the patient can go home,” says Dr. Shunk.

“Traditional cardiothoracic surgery requires an average 10-day hospital stay, and patients typically transfer from there to a skilled nursing facility for further recovery,” he adds.

“Patients are very happy with the procedure,” says TAVR Coordinator Julia E. Leone Hecker, NP. “They get to skip the opening of the chest, there's less pain, and they go home sooner.”

“In some cases we use conscious sedation, and avoid general anesthesia,” says Nurse Hecker. “It's exciting to be able offer this minimalist approach to critically ill patients, who may have not tolerated general anesthesia very well.”

Besides a faster recovery, other benefits of TAVR vs. standard heart surgery is that within one year after the procedure, patients decrease their repeated hospitalizations by half, fewer need a new pacemaker, fewer have kidney failure, and far fewer need additional procedures on the operated valve, according to data supplied by Edwards Lifesciences Corp., the company that makes some of the transcatheter aortic valves used in TAVR surgeries.

Not everyone is a good candidate for traditional heart surgery or TAVR and, as with any surgical procedure, there are risks.

For more information about TAVR at SFVAMC, contact TAVR Clinical Coordinator Julia E. Leone Hecker, NP, at (415) 221-4810, ext. 3243.

Take Time to MOVE! for a Healthier, New You

Are you as healthy as you want to be? Making lifestyle changes can be challenging, yet changes are important in achieving a healthier you.

Here are some classes and programs that the San Francisco VA Health Care System (SFVAHCS) offers. Your primary care provider can request a dietary consult, or a recreational therapy/strength and wellness consult to get you started.

MOVE! For Women Veterans: This 12-week class **starts March 16**. Participants will meet on Mondays from 2 – 3:30 p.m. in the San Francisco VA Medical Center Auditorium (Bldg. 7, 1st Floor) to receive instruction on: healthier meal planning; beginning and sustaining a personalized exercise program; how to improve mood, self-esteem and body image; how to deal with food cravings and emotional eating; how to reduce the risk for stroke, heart disease,

and diabetes; overcoming barriers to exercise and healthy eating, and more. Santa Rosa VA Clinic Women Veterans will also be able to join via video technology. For more information call Landon Zaki at (415) 221-4810, ext. 6536; Janet Faccenda at (415) 221-4810, ext. 2895; or Heather Haluska at (707) 569-2895.

MOVE! Session with VA Dietitian: You can discuss nutrition, weight control, diabetes and blood pressure with a registered dietitian, plus attend a weekly support group. Other nutrition programs offered include Veterans Cooking Classes and Living Well with Diabetes. To schedule a session, call VA Registered Dietitian and Certified Diabetes Educator Gary Yee at (415) 221-4810, ext. 4262.

MOVE! Strength and Wellness: This weight management-focused program provides 10-weeks of classes, held at the San Francisco VA Medical Center and at the Stonestown YMCA. Participants

work with a dietitian, recreational therapist, and behavioral health coach to improve their ability to manage their overall health and wellness (and lose a few pounds while they're at it). For more information call VA Strength & Wellness Coordinator Chris Geronimo at (415) 221-4810, ext. 3471.

Functional Flexibility Class: This class is held at the Richmond YMCA with a goal to improve concentration, range of motion, flexibility, and mental and physical health. For more information call VA Recreational Therapist Christian Dillon at (415) 221-4810, ext. 3471.

Circuit Training Class: This class is held at the Richmond YMCA. Circuit Training is a form of body conditioning or resistance training using moderate to high-intensity aerobics. It targets strength building and muscular endurance. For more information about this class call Chris Geronimo at (415) 221-4810, ext. 3471.



Women Veterans Town Hall

Featuring a presentation on
Women Veterans Health Care

March 11, 2015
5 - 6 p.m.
Auditorium
(Bldg. 7, 1st Floor)

Veteran Kudos

“The San Francisco VA rocks! We have always had excellent care there, and the staff has gone out of their way to accommodate us. A special shout out to Dr. Navarro in the dental clinic and Dr. A. Wilson at the Women’s Clinic!” – M.K.

(To Debbie Mason, Ukiah Clinic)
“Dear Debbie...I am 99 years old... I told you my problem and you solved it. Within 6 to 8 hours my medication was hand delivered to me. Thank you!” – B.T.

