

Our Heart Team Completes 100th Lifesaving TAVR

On November 25, 2013, a Heart Team at the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SfVAMC) successfully performed its first transcatheter aortic valve replacements (TAVR) for two Veteran patients who needed, but who were high risk for, open-heart surgery. Now, nearly three years later, on August 31, 2016, the team performed its 100th lifesaving TAVR procedure on an 80-year-old U.S. Navy Veteran named Gerald Cullen.

“I was really surprised that it happened so quick,” says Mr. Cullen. “I was conscious pretty much the whole time. They asked me what I was allergic to prior to the procedure, and I said, ‘I’m allergic to penicillin and pain!’”

“I had the procedure on August 31. It went real well and I had no pain whatsoever. The day after the surgery, September 1, they had me up and about. I was walking all around the hospital. The third day, September 2, they wrote my discharge papers and my son came and picked me up and took me home.”

SfVAMC is one of the few VAs in the country performing this procedure. “This is a milestone--we have certainly saved some lives,” says Chief of Interventional Cardiology Kendrick Shunk, MD. 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. Traditional surgery involves replacing the aortic valve through open-heart surgery. For many patients and the elderly or frail, the traditional surgery is too high-risk, and they wouldn’t survive.



SfVAMC’s Heart Team huddles with patient Gerald Cullen prior to performing 100th TAVR procedure.

Untreated aortic valve disease is responsible for more than 25,000 deaths annually. “That’s why TAVR is so important,” says Dr. Shunk. “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.”

“Our patients are very happy with the TAVR procedure,” says Clinical Coordinator Julia E. Leone Hecker, NP. “They get to skip the opening of the chest, there’s less pain, and they go home sooner. They come to us with fatigue, dizziness, shortness

of breath and chest pain, and they leave feeling so much better, with more energy, and little to no pain.”

“Besides a faster recovery and fewer risks, 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,” says Dr. Shunk. “Not to mention that our patients are able to live fuller, more productive lives than they would have without TAVR.”

“I feel real good,” says Mr. Cullen. “I think TAVR is wonderful. I would recommend for any Veteran who has the opportunity, to have this procedure done rather than open heart surgery, because the recovery time is very minimal and the pain is nothing to speak of. I am so very grateful for the expertise of the surgeons and the nurses, and the entire staff that performed my TAVR procedure, and for the surgeries I’ve had in the past 20 years through the VA Health Care program. I certainly recommend TAVR to any patient.”

For more information about TAVR at SfVAMC, contact Nurse Hecker at (415) 221-4810, ext. 2-3243.

Women Veterans Health Fair to be Held in San Bruno

San Bruno VA Clinic is hosting a Women Veterans Health Fair on **Monday, October 17 from 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.** to offer local Women Veterans a chance to learn more about VA health benefits and enroll in VA health care.

Free blood pressure checks will be offered. For Women Veterans enrolled in VA health care (or enrolling that day), there will also be free flu shots and free dental exams and screenings.

You can also speak with a nutritionist and a Veterans Service Organization representative.

The clinic is located at 1001 Sneath Lane, Suite 300, 3rd Floor, San Bruno.

For more information about this event, contact San Bruno Clinic Director Pat Ragan, MSN, RN, at patricia.ragan@va.gov or call (650) 615-6000.



San Bruno VA Clinic, 1001 Sneath Lane, Suite 300, 3rd Floor, San Bruno.

Veterans Return to Work Fair

The San Francisco VA Health Care System's Compensated Work Therapy Program is sponsoring a Veterans Return to Work Resource Fair on Tuesday, **October 25, 2016 from 1:30 – 4 p.m.** at the San Francisco VA Medical Center Auditorium, Bldg. 7, 1st Floor.

All Veterans who want to return to work are invited to attend. Learn more about service-connected benefits, returning to work while on Social

Security disability, vocational rehab services, employment resources, and VA health benefits. Meet with representatives from the Success Center of San Francisco. This fair can help you find jobs in these fields: hotel security, janitorial, warehouse, cashier, office admin, security officers, housekeeping aide, server, study hall manager, and more. For more information, contact Emory Wilson at (415) 281-5186, (415) 954-2109, or emory.wilson@va.gov.

Check Out VA's App Store for Info

If you have a smartphone, other mobile device, or a computer with Internet, VA has an app for you! You can access free VA apps that help you manage your health, deal with stress, connect with your health team, make appointments, access your medical records, learn about VA benefits, and more.

VA apps are available at <https://mobile.va.gov/appstore/veterans>. There are no costs associated with using VA's Mobile Apps, but your mobile carrier may charge you based on your data plan.

Here are some VA apps available for Veterans:

Ask a Pharmacist <https://mobile.va.gov/app/ask-a-pharmacist>
You can access information about VA pharmacies and medication, with the comfort of knowing the information is valid and from trusted sources. Learn how to read prescription labels and identify pills by sight.

Concussion Coach <https://mobile.va.gov/app/concussion-coach>
Provides resources to help manage symptoms of concussion or mild-to-moderate traumatic brain injury.

Mindfulness Coach <https://mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach>
Provides tools and guided exercises to help you stay in the moment.

MOVE! Coach <https://mobile.va.gov/app/move-coach>
Provides education, tools, and guidance designed to help you meet your weight and health goals.

PTSD Coach <https://mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach>
Gives information and tools to cope with PTSD. Includes self-assessments, symptom tracking, educational materials, and tools to monitor stress.

Stay Quit Coach <https://mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach>
Helps you "stay quit" after you stop smoking with tools to control cravings, reminder messages, and support links.

