



Independence

HEALTH SYSTEM

TO MEDIA

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Photo (Left to right)

Collaborating physicians Dr. Richard Begg, Dr. Edward McDowell, and Dr. Richard Neff with patients Eugene Sobota, Leonard Medvetz and Robert Lloyd pictured in the cath lab at Indiana Regional Medical Center (IRMC). Dr. Begg oversees the cath lab on behalf of the joint venture between IRMC and Independence Health System through Butler Memorial Hospital. Dr. McDowell is a cardiologist with the IRMC Physician Group and Dr. Neff is IRMC Chief Medical Officer.

INDEPENDENCE HEALTH SYSTEM, IRMC JOINT VENTURE AT THE HEART OF LIFE-SAVING CARE FOR COMMUNITY

Trio of Friends Benefit From Collaborative Cardiovascular Program

INDIANA, PA, March 13, 2024 ... They gather several times a week for coffee and conversation. They came together because of shared interests in tennis, experiences at IUP when they were on faculty, or at the invitation of friends who were already part of the group.

But the bonds for three of these Indiana County retirees goes straight to the heart, as they have each benefitted from the joint venture between Indiana Regional Medical Center (IRMC) and Independence Health System through Butler Memorial Hospital.

Robert Lloyd, Leonard Medvetz and Eugene Sobota are thriving today because of care from expertly trained cardiac specialists and advanced care providers who were close by when their lives depended on it.

Since 2016, interventional cardiologists from Butler have provided round-the-clock coverage for the cardiac catheterization laboratory at IRMC, helping patients win their battles against heart disease in emergency situations, performing minimally invasive cardiac procedures and providing diagnostic cardiac testing and interventional peripheral procedures. Over that time, nearly 4,000 cardiac catheterizations have been performed at IRMC, with exceptional patient results.

“The relationship between Independence Health System and Indiana Regional Medical Center has been outstanding for the care of patients in the Indiana community,” said Richard Begg, MD, FACC, FSCAI, the Butler interventional cardiologist who oversees the cath lab for the joint venture. “We have provided care that has improved outcomes and saved countless lives in this region. I am honored and proud of what we have built together to provide excellent patient care with outstanding outcomes.”

Through the partnership, patients who need a tertiary level of cardiac care, such as coronary artery heart bypass grafting (CABG) or transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), are transferred to Butler Memorial Hospital. Post-discharge, they return to Indiana where they continue to be followed by their hometown cardiologist affiliated with Butler or IRMC and participate in cardiac rehabilitation at IRMC.

“We are proud to continue this partnership as it signifies our commitment to expanding access to high-quality, safe cardiac care within the region. This allows patients to have a broader range of treatment available to them, and they don’t have to travel far. We are fortunate to have expert physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners who are all part of the patient care team,” added Richard Neff, MD, Chief Medical Officer at IRMC.

Gene Sobota of Center Township was among the earliest IRMC cath lab cases,

having received a single stent in 2017 after a stress test revealed a blockage. The retired Caterpillar computer systems administrator felt great afterwards, and didn't give his heart health much thought until he noticed his energy declining last year, coupled with fatigue and shortness of breath.

Sobota had always been aware he had a heart murmur and was good about keeping tabs on it through regular echocardiograms. When these new symptoms emerged, he knew it was time to take action, particularly after his Butler cardiologist, Varun Avula, DO, FACC, indicated that if the condition was left untreated, his life expectancy was about two years. A CT scan and a second catheterization confirmed he would benefit from TAVR. On August 23, the valve was repaired at Butler Memorial, and Sobota returned home.

Now in cardiac rehab at IRMC, Sobota, 81, finds his vigor returning and he and his wife of 58 years, Romayne, can't say enough about the care. "Everything was great, from beginning to end. I'm working on building back up my strength and looking forward to summer."

Six years ago, Bob Lloyd felt pressure in his chest and IRMC Physician Group cardiologist Edward McDowell, MD, FACC, suggested a cardiac stress test would be beneficial as would a cardiac catheterization. The retired IUP music educator and former principal oboist for the Johnstown Symphony knew things were severe when he was informed by the cath lab team he wouldn't be going home; rather he was being transferred to Butler Memorial where he underwent triple bypass surgery. "They told me two of my arteries were 90 percent blocked and the third was at 100 percent," recalled the White Township resident.

Of his hospitalization, Lloyd chuckles when he thinks about his Butler heart surgeon George P. Davliakos, MD, and the soft-spoken sincerity with which the doctor spoke to his wife, Linda. "You saved Bob's life," Lloyd recalls her saying post-surgery. "Dr. Davliakos replied: 'it had to be done.'"

In addition to Lloyd's high regard for the surgical team, he was impressed with the nursing staff and the surroundings in the intensive care unit. "Everything was state of the art as far as I'm concerned, and I really appreciated the heart-shaped pillow they gave me. There were 8 or 10 nurses looking after me during my stay and they all signed

it.”

With no history of heart disease, Lloyd felt their family had a healthy lifestyle. Now the Lloyds follow a fairly strict diet, eating meat sparingly and adding fish at least weekly to their menu as well as walking daily. Their son and daughter are following suit to forestall future heart problems.

Like his buddies, Len Medvetz thought little about his heart health during his working years. He knew his grandmother died of a heart condition, but the FMC Corp. retiree was active, caring for his large property and pursuing his hobbies in the backyard shed. All that changed two years ago, when he found it hard to walk around outdoors without resting, and his wife, Dori, urged him to seek medical advice. A visit with IRMC Physician Group Cardiology initially resulted in medical management but Medvetz wasn't improving and decided he wanted further testing, and headed to Butler Memorial for a heart catheterization. While in the Butler cath lab, Medvetz noticed what appeared to be an emergency response team assembling. Then he heard someone say to him, “You are going to need heart surgery.”

Dr. Davliakos greeted him and reassured him that all would be well. “He put me at ease and the next thing I remember is waking up in the ICU, and being asked to get out of bed. I had no pain or discomfort.”

The date of his bypass surgery will forever be in his memory – Oct. 6, 2022. Just two days later, his first grandchild – Nadia Christine - was born. And six weeks later Medvetz was beginning cardiac rehab in Indiana.

There have been a few hiccups over the past year as another underlying condition was finally diagnosed and addressed. Medvetz is back in cardiac rehab to achieve a complete recovery, and focusing on that little girl who keeps giving him a reason to stay well.

“Our team always has been dedicated to providing comprehensive cardiac care to our patients, and our partnership with Independence Health System Cardiology allows us to further advance and make good on our promise to treat patients with the best possible care,” added Dr. McDowell. “Like the patients in these stories, many members of the local community already have benefited from the partnership and resources available to them, in the event that they have a cardiac event or are simply

needing routine cardiology care.”

As for the men’s weekly coffee klatch, the trio is happy to celebrate their good health as well as their good fortune in having such a wonderful support group.

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