2009

Ventricular Assist Device Program Gains Prestigious Accreditation

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A mandate in spring of 2009 by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) ruled that only CMS certified centers would be eligible for reimbursement under Medicare for Ventricular Assist Device (VAD) implantation. The CMS visited in July, and Jefferson was accredited as of August 11, 2009.

“This ensures that we are able to offer our first-rate care to the widest possible patient population,” says Director of the Mechanical Circulatory Support Program Scott Silvestry, MD, “which is critical to our mission as an academic medical center.”

During the CMS two-day visit, the auditor had what Dr. Silvestry describes as “an extremely favorable impression of the multidisciplinary and collaborative spirit between the surgical and medical teams.” VAD Coordinator Barbara Ebert, CRNP, is instrumental in managing care and assuring consistency across the entire process. “These patients are extremely labor-intensive for caregivers—even more so after the LVAD implant,” Dr. Silvestry notes. “They require constant monitoring and evaluation. Multidisciplinary collaborative care is essential to good outcomes for all of our patients.” He adds that the Departments of Pharmacy, Physical and Occupational Therapy, and Nursing, as well as students and fellows, have been active collaborators, from the organ harvest process, to echocardiograms, to post-operative care in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and Heart Failure Unit (at 5 West in the Gibbon Building).

VAD technology shows a significant and sustainable benefit for patients with heart failure who are not candidates for a heart transplant. “The reality is that few patients are eligible for transplants,” Dr. Silvestry says. For some patients who are candidates, the wait time may exceed 200 days. “VADs, including experimental therapies such as the Jarvik Heart, can get them through this potentially long wait to transplant.”

Under the leadership of James Diehl, MD, Director of the Cardiothoracic Surgery Division, the Cardiac Surgery Program as a whole has expanded greatly over the last six years and recruited several excellent
surgeons. Linda Bogar, MD, who was recruited five years ago, has now taken on a more senior role, which includes mentoring the more junior surgeons as well as performing a number of heart transplants and VAD procedures on her own. Benjamin Youdelman, MD, has now been on staff for two years. His practice, based primarily at Einstein Hospital, specializes in endovascular and thoracic aortic surgery, valve repair and replacement. Michel Haddad, MD, who joined Jefferson in 2008, is acting Director of the Surgical Cardiac Care Unit. With a wealth of experience in intensive care of cardiac surgery patients, Dr. Haddad splits his time between the operating room and the ICU. Finally, Hitoshi Hirose, MD, who recently completed fellowships at Hahnemann and Jefferson, joined the faculty last August which further increases the program's capacity to care for complex cardiac patients.
In medical research—like in all areas of innovation—it is impossible to predict where the next great idea might come from. The Department of Surgery recently hosted a researcher who is investigating an unusual potential cancer treatment: Anthony Holland, PhD, a researcher who has conducted at Carnegie Hall and has been teaching at Skidmore College for 27 years. Since early in his career, Dr. Holland has been interested in physics and acoustics. "Years ago I read a book about a frequency machine that was capable of destroying microorganisms if it was tuned to the right frequency," he said. Then, when I added the elephant harmonics, I looked through the microscope and discovered that the microorganisms had shattered. It reminded me of a crystal glass chaser what is a soprano hits just the right note." Dr. Holland invited him to watch the video of his cells. After several minutes, Dr. Brody asked, "Could you blow up cancer cells like that?" Dr. Holland said, "I don't know, but if we could, I'd be happy to try it!"" What does an average day look like? --Normal day usually mins. Daily, I might recruit patients to participate in a particular study. I keep up with the literature, stay current. I supervised a study for four days straight on an ongoing industry-sponsored trial. I also evaluate new studies proposed to our surgeons to ensure their fiscal viability, if they are ethically appropriate and whether we have the appropriate patient population. Given the range of responsibilities, I'm juggling a critical part of my job (time management!)

Sharon Melody, RN, BSN, CNOR Clinical Research Nurse Project Manager How long have you been at Jefferson? "I’ve been here for an and an since 1995, I first in the Department of Surgery. In the interim I worked at Temple University Hospital and Shriners Hospital for Children. I’ve been at Jefferson since March 2009, but previously served as the research coordinator for the Divisions of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery.

What are the responsibilities of your current role? I coordinate clinical trials for the Department of Surgery and handle the administration of institutional review board submissions and budgets for industry trials. My primary responsibilities include working with the faculty who are undertaking an increasing number of research projects and being flexible to assist in the department's efforts to establish a more robust clinical trial department in the program.

I'm required to become certified as a Clinical Research Coordinator. [The] Board Certified Clinical Research Coordinator (CERT) certification by the Association of Clinical Research Professionals requires experience in clinical practice, knowledge of Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations, a comprehensive written exam, and current refresher courses in clinical research as well as nursing.

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Jefferson has been extremely open-minded throughout this process, which is the ultimate test of a research institution. As luck would have it, in 2008, Dr. Holland attended a Skidmore Alumni Day presentation on pancreatic cancer by his former student Jonathan Brody, PhD, Assistant Professor in Jefferson’s Division of Surgical Research. Following the presentation, Dr. Holland invited him to watch the video of his cells. After several minutes, Dr. Brody asked, "Could you blow up cancer cells like that?" Dr. Holland said, "I don’t know, but if we could, I’d be happy to try it!" Dr. Holland then arranged Dr. Brody’s mini-sabbatical in the Jefferson lab. "Jefferson has been extremely open-minded throughout this process, which is the ultimate test of a research institution," says Dr. Holland. "I assumed that physicians and other researchers who were interested in this kind of research would be interested. And, sure enough, they were!" Dr. Holland then arranged Dr. Brody’s mini-sabbatical in the Jefferson lab. "Jefferson has been extremely open-minded throughout this process, which is the ultimate test of a research institution," says Dr. Holland. "I assumed that physicians and other researchers who were interested in this kind of research would be interested. And, sure enough, they were!"