

Second Chances

Newark Beth Israel Surpasses 600th Heart Transplant

For more than two decades, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center's (NBIMC) Heart Failure Treatment and Transplantation Program has been at the forefront of therapy. More recently, they've been garnering recognition for that work.

For two consecutive years, NBIMC has ranked among the Top 50 hospitals on U.S. News & World Report's America's Best Hospitals for Specialty Care in Heart and Heart Surgery, ranking 47th in 2010-2011. It was ranked as the top hospital in New Jersey 2010-11. The heart transplant program remains one of the most active in the country, ranking among the top 10 in the nation by volume for five consecutive years, with long-term survival rates that surpass national benchmarks.

A 673-bed regional care, non-profit teaching hospital, NBIMC is an affiliate of the Saint Barnabas Health Care System and an important

program partner with NJ Sharing Network.

Surgeons with NBIMC's Heart Failure Treatment and Transplant Program have performed more than 600 heart transplants on patients ranging in age from 15 to 73 since the program was started in 1989.

"Our mission at NJ Sharing Network is to give people another chance at life through donation, and when our hospital partners believe in our mission, it makes the donation process easier. Newark Beth Israel Medical Center believes in people having another opportunity at life," said Morgan R. Johnson, Hospital Services Manager, who works closely with medical staff at NBIMC and other hospitals, educating them about organ donation.

NBIMC staff is indeed committed to saving lives and supporting NJ Sharing Network's mission, participating in health fairs, and other events.

Patricia Dimitriou, Nursing Director of the Cardiothoracic ICU and Coronary Care Unit, said there's still room to educate the public about organ donation. She is leading a team in NJ Sharing Network's inaugural 5K Walk/Run on June 12 to help raise funds and awareness. "People have reluctance about donation. It's important to dispel any myths and get the word out there that great things can come out of something bad."

In her role as nursing director, Patricia manages the nurses who see both ends of the transplant spectrum, she said, adding "the heroes in all of this are the nursing staff. Not only do we see patients get organs, but we see patients donate organs. Usually, families come to a decision to donate under very tragic circumstances. It's all handled very well and very compassionately."

Patricia has kind words for NJ Sharing

For the second consecutive year, U.S. News & World Report ranks Newark Beth Israel Medical Center in its Top 50 hospitals for Heart and Heart Surgery.





Mark J. Zucker, MD, has 25 years experience in the field of heart transplantation. Under his leadership, the Heart Failure Treatment and Transplant Program at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center has performed 600 transplants and emerged as one of the nation's most respected heart transplant and ventricular assist device (VAD) centers. Dr. Zucker will receive the Edward J. III Physician's Award. The award is presented to a New Jersey physician who merits recognition for distinguished service as a leader in the medical profession and in the community.

Network employees who interact with NBIMC's patients and medical professionals. And Morgan agrees with Patricia's assessment regarding the nurses: "I don't know what we would do without the compassion and expertise of the nursing staff—they are the ones that help make donation happen."

Although Patricia has worked in this specialty for more than 20 years, she still finds the wonder in transplantation.

"I'm still in awe every time we do a heart transplant," she said. "The whole thing is just amazing."



Heart recipient Bob Herron was transplanted at Newark Beth Israel in 1998. He has volunteered for both NJ Sharing Network and the Hearty Hearts for 13 years.

Dr. Mark Zucker, cardiologist and Director of the Heart Failure Treatment and Transplant Program, credits his staff, including surgeons Dr. Margarita Camacho and Dr. Sinan A. Simsir and cardiology colleague Dr. David A. Baran, with the remarkable work being performed at NBIMC. "This team is second to none," he said. "They are totally committed to the patients, program and the hospital. We simply don't believe in the word 'can't'."

"The most rewarding part of my job is taking critically ill patients and restoring them to normal, functional lives," Dr. Zucker said, adding, "If you think about it, it's very unusual to be able to transition someone from living with a terminal illness to becoming a normal healthy individual once again."

NBIMC's multidisciplinary heart transplant team includes cardiologists, cardiothoracic surgeons, transplant coordinators, ventricular assist device (VAD) coordinators, a transplant pharmacist, registered dietitian and social workers. This highly specialized team performed 52 heart transplants in 2010 and has performed more than one transplant per week for the past 14 months, Dr. Zucker said.

NBIMC considers its heart patients part of its big family. Every year, it hosts a party for its patients and an annual Heart and Sole walk in memory of Mary Anne Ahearn, a 1990 heart transplant recipient, who died 12 years after her surgery. Also in 1999, the Society of Hearty

"We simply don't believe in the word 'can't'."

-Dr. Mark Zucker

Hearts, a support group for heart transplant patients, was created.

Vicki K. Eze-Hunter knows first hand about the success of NBIMC's heart program and the Hearty Hearts. A heart recipient, she serves as president of the volunteer group, which offers support to heart and lung transplant patients and their families.

After some members visited with her, Vicki said she felt better about undergoing her heart surgery in 1999. She remembers thinking, "They each got a transplant. Okay, they did this, I can handle this."

Today, Vicki is also an active volunteer with NJ Sharing Network, bringing the partnership with NBIMC full circle. It takes coordination, cooperation and commitment to make transplantation possible, so everyone – whether professional or volunteer – plays an important role, said Morgan. "Our partnership is the lifeline that gives them the 'gift of life'."



Creating a Lifeline for Others

Vicki K. Eze-Hunter received a heart transplant at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center the day before Valentine's Day 1999. Since that time, the mother of two has stayed busy as a volunteer and champion of organ and tissue donation. She considers the family of her donor a part of her extended family.