AORTIC VALVE REPLACEMENT
No need to leave town for complex procedure
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Why is salt bad for your heart?
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Pictured: Cindy Mason, East Dubuque, Illinois, at Dubuque Arboretum and Botanical Gardens
A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
Russell M. Knight, President and CEO

After 142 columns containing approximately 71,000 words (about the length of a typical mystery novel, according to Wikipedia), this “Letter from the President” will be my last, as by the time you read this I will have retired after 18 years as Mercy’s president and CEO. Although that’s quite a bit longer than the average tenure of a hospital administrator these days, I’m still a relative newcomer by the standards at Mercy, where we are blessed with many talented employees and members of the medical staff who have served here for 25-30 years or more. In fact, at our annual employee recognition banquet this month, we will be honoring 25 colleagues who have worked here for 35 years, 15 people who have been part of the Mercy team for 40 years, and four who have done excellent work on behalf of our community for 45 years or more.

The wisdom, expertise, and good judgment demonstrated daily by the literally hundreds of people who have dedicated themselves to serving others through the commitment of their entire adult lives as employees of Mercy Medical Center – Dubuque and Dyersville, are qualities of tremendous worth that cannot easily be obtained or replicated, and which go a long way toward explaining why and how Mercy has earned such a stellar reputation in our region, throughout our state, and among the nearly 90 hospitals in our national system. I am extraordinarily grateful to have been given the opportunity to work with such an incredible group of people. By combining their knowledge and experience with attitudes that exemplify compassion, respect, care, and concern, they have created an institution of great value for our community.

Throughout my time in Dubuque I have been treated exceptionally well by our Board of Trustees, employees, volunteers, and members of the medical staff. Here at Mercy we are fortunate to have an environment characterized by teamwork, collaboration, and partnership, with nearly 2,000 people (including physicians and volunteers, as well as full-time and part-time employees) all pulling in the same direction to fulfill our common mission, achieve our shared vision of excellence, and uphold our mutual values. When you augment this with the incredibly generous support Mercy receives from all sectors of the community, it’s hard to imagine a better setting in which to work. I feel as lucky today as I did back in the summer of 1997 when I was offered this job.

I’m confident the transition to a new leader will go smoothly, not just because my successor—our vice president for patient care services, Kay Takes—is an experienced and accomplished individual who has, among many other things, led Mercy to three-time designation as a Magnet hospital, but also because we believe in promoting a culture of widespread, all-pervasive leadership where each person’s contributions are valued and where everyone has an opportunity to influence progress toward our goals and objectives.

I will miss having the chance to watch firsthand as the organization and the individuals within it continue to grow and develop, but I appreciate the many opportunities that have been afforded me across the years, including being able share some of my thoughts with you through the vehicle of this column. Thank you, farewell, and best wishes!
eating fish for HEART HEALTH

Find out why the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish are good for your heart

The American Heart Association recommends eating at least two servings of fish per week.

Fish oil supplements and foods containing omega-3 fatty acids, like flaxseed and walnuts, are also beneficial but do not appear to provide as great a health benefit as the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish.

Fatty fish, such as salmon, lake trout, herring, sardines, and tuna, contain the most omega-3 fatty acids and therefore the most benefit.

Omega-3 fatty acids appear to reduce the risk of heart disease by:

» Decreasing triglycerides
» Lowering blood pressure
» Reducing blood clotting
» Decreasing stroke and heart failure risk
» Reducing irregular heartbeats

SOURCE: AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION
CINDY’S STORY

Chose surgery at Mercy rather than traveling out of town

The experience was wonderful ... I can't say enough good about Dr. Bezzina and the entire nursing staff at Mercy.”

— Cindy Mason
Ten years ago, Cindy Mason, of East Dubuque, had a heart attack and had an angioplasty and stent placed at Mercy. During that time, she was also diagnosed with aortic stenosis and learned that at some point, she would need to have her aortic valve replaced.

“Aortic stenosis causes a twofold problem,” explains Lance Bezzina, DO, cardiovascular surgeon at Medical Associates Clinic and medical director of the cardiac rehabilitation program at Mercy. “It causes a heart problem, and it also causes a problem for the rest of the body. As the valve narrows, the heart muscle behind the valve struggles to eject the same amount of blood and, after time, this muscle can weaken. That also means less blood is going to the rest of the body, and starving the body of blood and oxygen.”

The disease can then progress to heart failure.

When Cindy was diagnosed with aortic stenosis, she wasn’t experiencing any symptoms, so her physician continued to monitor it closely.

“Then last year, it escalated,” Cindy describes. “I started having shortness of breath. Even walking upstairs with a laundry basket full of clothes, I would get short of breath. I was fatigued.”

Cindy recalls a time when she had to park her car farther from the entrance at work. By the time she made it to door, she had to sit down to catch her breath. She knew it was time for surgery.

“We try to do surgery right before or as soon as the first symptoms develop,” Dr. Bezzina explains. “If a patient waits too long and the disease progresses too far then replacing the valve does not help the patient because the heart muscle is too weak behind the valve. The patient could then need a heart transplant or a ventricular assist device. That is why it is imperative to get to these patients before that happens and why it is so important that if patients have the symptoms that they see their primary doctor or a cardiologist.”

Cindy knew immediately that she wanted to have her surgery done at Mercy rather than traveling to a bigger hospital out of town.

“When I heard about Dr. Bezzina, well of course I wanted to have it done here. I didn’t have any second thoughts about that.”

Cindy was very pleased with the outcome of her surgery. “The experience was wonderful. I don’t think it could have gone any better. I can’t say enough good about Dr. Bezzina and the entire nursing staff at Mercy.” Cindy was able to return home after just three nights at Mercy.

It is extremely important that patients enroll in a cardiac rehab program following surgery.

“Cindy was like many typical valve patients who had become unable to exercise due to symptoms the failing valve causes, primarily shortness of breath and fatigue,” explains Mercy cardiac rehab coordinator Elaine Thier. “After surgery she needed to recover from having a big surgery and also begin to gain some of her lost stamina in general back. We call this ‘deconditioned,’ an almost unavoidable part of needing to have a valve replaced.”

Cardiac rehab includes educational classes and monitored exercise.

“Cindy was always challenged when she came to cardiac rehab to exercise,” Elaine says. “The level of the work was light in the beginning, and it increased steadily over 6 weeks as her stamina improved. Cindy was a loyal exerciser on her off days which helped her tremendously. She was very positive and forward thinking in her recovery from this surgery.”

Cardiac rehab patients can use the facility for exercise even after completing the program, which Cindy continues to do.

“Cardiac rehab really makes all the difference,” Cindy says. “It gets you motivated to exercise. I have not had shortness of breath since surgery at all. I’m exercising, even after cardiac rehab, and I could not have done that before. So I’m better than before. I feel great.”

“Cindy could have gone anywhere for her surgery but she chose me and to stay in town,” says Dr. Bezzina. “That speaks volumes about our program and the care we give here. Patients don’t have to leave town to have very complex surgeries, especially to their heart.”

Cindy could have gone anywhere for her surgery ... That speaks volumes about [Mercy’s] program and the care we give here. Patients don’t have to leave town to have very complex surgeries, especially to their heart.”

— Lance Bezzina, DO
Q: I always hear about salt being bad for my heart, but I don’t know why that is. Can you explain?

A: Sodium can increase blood pressure in some people by holding excess fluid in the body. The excess fluid can create an overload on your heart. As we age, our blood pressure rises. Learning how to eat with less sodium can help in the years to come to avoid high blood pressure. This also reduces risk of other conditions associated with too much sodium such as stroke and heart failure.

Most people consume approximately 3,400 mg of sodium per day or more. Recommendations for salt intake range from 1,500 to 2,400 mg per day.

Ways to reduce sodium in the diet is to try your food before using the salt shaker (biggest contributor), avoid processed foods, choose more fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables (as opposed to canned vegetables) and learn to read food labels. Choose foods with less than or equal to 350 mg sodium per serving when using the nutrition facts label.

Kristie Jacobsen, RD, LD, clinical nutrition manager, Mercy Dubuque

FLU SHOT

Do your fall and winter plans include nausea, fever, muscle aches and fatigue?

If not, get a flu shot. The influenza vaccine is recommended for all adults and is available at Mercy Family Pharmacy. Walk-ins are available at the Elm Street location. Call 563.583.7379 for more information.

AORTIC ANEURYSMS:
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The most common aneurysms occur in the aorta, the large artery that carries blood to the rest of the body, and a ruptured aortic aneurysm can cause severe bleeding that is often fatal. Join cardiovascular surgeon Lance Bezzina, DO, of Medical Associates Clinic, as he reviews the definition, causes, treatments, and advances of aortic aneurysms.

Thursday, October 15
6 – 7 p.m.
250 Mercy Drive, Dubuque
No fee. Registration required at 563-589-9600 or mercydubuque.com/events.

MERCY GIFT SHOP

WALK INTO CHRISTMAS
GIFT SHOW AND BAKE SALE

Sunday, November 1
11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Monday and Tuesday, November 2 and 3
9 a.m. – 7 p.m.

Proceeds benefit children’s needs at Mercy Medical Center

Healthy Variety

Created and approved by Mercy dietitians, Healthy Variety meals are heart healthy, low in sodium, diabetic friendly and delicious.

Ten varieties are available for purchase in the Mercy cafeteria.

For more information, call 563.589.9655 or visit mercydubuque.com/meals.
YOGA FOR YOUR HEART

Yoga is a physical practice that emphasizes breath, focus and meditation and is wonderful for your heart. Yoga builds cardiovascular health, increases lung capacity, and improves respiratory function and heart rate. It also boosts blood circulation, builds muscle, and decreases inflammation.

When starting a yoga program, your instructor will ensure you’re doing poses properly and at a level that’s appropriate for you.

Here are two basic poses to introduce you to yoga.

TREE POSE
» Stand with your arms at your sides.
» Shift your weight onto your left leg and place the sole of your right foot inside your left thigh, keeping hips facing forward. If this is too challenging, bring your right foot to the inside of your left ankle, keeping your toes on the floor for balance. As you develop better balance, move your foot to the inside of your left calf.
» Once balanced, bring your hands in front of you in prayer position, palms together.
» On an inhalation, extend your arms over your shoulders, palms separated and facing each another. Stay for 30 seconds.
» Lower and then repeat on opposite side.

WARRIOR
» Stand with your legs 3 – 4 feet apart, turning your right foot out 90 degrees and left foot in slightly.
» Bring your hands to your hips and relax your shoulders, then extend arms out to the sides, palms down.
» Bend your right knee 90 degrees, keeping knee over ankle; gaze out over your right hand. Stay for 1 minute.
» Then switch sides and repeat.

BLACKBERRY CRISP

MAKES 4 SERVINGS • SERVING SIZE: 1 CUP

INGREDIENTS
2 ½ cups fresh blackberries
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
3 tablespoons whole wheat flour
1 tablespoon orange juice
½ cup rolled oats
2 tablespoons chopped pecans
3 tablespoons brown sugar
¾ teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 ½ tablespoons canola oil

INSTRUCTIONS
1 - Preheat oven to 350°.
2 - In a large bowl, combine blackberries with granulated sugar, 1 tablespoon of flour, and orange juice.
3 - Transfer to a 1½ - quart ovenproof casserole dish.
4 - In another bowl, combine oats, pecans, brown sugar, the remaining 2 tablespoons flour and cinnamon. Drizzle with oil and stir to combine.
5 - Sprinkle oat mixture over fruit.
6 - Bake until fruit is bubbling and topping is golden, about 15 to 20 minutes. Let stand for at least 10 minutes before serving.
If you have time to stand in line for your favorite coffee, you have time for a mammogram.

It only takes about 30 minutes, and it could save your life.

If you’re over 40, talk with your primary care provider about getting an annual breast cancer screening. Then you can better enjoy time spent on other things.

To schedule an appointment, call 563.589.9040.

BLACKBERRY CRISP

Here’s a scrumptious blackberry crisp that delivers all the warming flavors of an old-fashioned crisp without the butter-laden calories. This berry crisp works with raspberries, too. This dessert is high fiber and includes protein. The recipe offers very little saturated fat and sodium — both unusual characteristics of desserts.”

— Kristie Jacobsen, RD, LD

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION:
226 calories, 8g fat, 1g saturated fat, 0mg cholesterol, 6mg sodium, 39g carbohydrates, 8g fiber, 5g protein