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Sanger Clinic Cardiologists Among First in the U.S. to Pioneer New Cardiac Stent

Cardiologists at the Carolinas Heart Institute at Carolinas Medical Center are among the first in the country offering new hope to patients suffering coronary artery disease with the use of a new medicated stent, approved yesterday, April 24, for use by the United States Food and Drug Administration.

Stents are small scaffold-like devices traditionally used to keep blood vessels open after balloon angioplasty. In many cases, though, body tissue grows around and into the stents, causing the artery to become blocked again, often forcing the patient to undergo open-heart surgery.

“This is the biggest breakthrough in cardiac care in many years,” said B. Hadley Wilson, M.D., of the Sanger Clinic and Medical Director of the Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory at CHI. “This sets a new standard of care for cardiac patients and eventually will eliminate the need for many open heart surgeries. I can’t over-emphasize how important it is that the Food and Drug Administration has approved this device.”

This stent, like all such devices, is delivered by balloon catheter. When the cardiologist gets it into position, the balloon is inflated and the stent that had been placed around the balloon expands to the proper diameter. The balloon is then deflated and the catheter removed, leaving the stent positioned to keep the vessel open.

“What’s different about this new drug-eluting stent is that it’s covered with a polymer coating containing a medication called Sirolimus. The medicine is time-released during the first few weeks after the stent is placed, deterring the tissue growth,” said Charles A. Simonton, M.D., a Sanger Clinic cardiologist. “This re-blockage, called ‘restenosis,’ has challenged physicians for years.”

The Carolinas Heart Institute (CHI) was one of 20 key centers nationwide involved in the clinical trials of the drug-eluting stents, which began in 2001. The FDA based its approval of the device on the pivotal results of this research. There are currently 30 investigative trials ongoing at CHI.

“When we began our trial it was clear that this technology was going to vastly improve the care of our heart patients,” said Dr. Simonton. “The trials have proven just how effective drug-eluting stents are at preventing re-blockage of coronary arteries.”

The first patient to receive the FDA approved stent was treated at the new Carolinas Stent Center. With an interventional team available 24-hours a day, the center was developed to provide the region with access to the most advanced stenting technology, highly trained and experienced cardiologists, and same day access to services, including emergency angioplasty or stenting within 30-minutes of arrival for patients suffering from a heart attack. The center brings together the expertise of The Sanger Clinic and state-of-the-art facilities of CHI to one location.

Last year alone, more than 12,000 patients underwent cardiac catheterization procedures at Carolinas Medical Center, and CHI cardiac surgeons performed 1,021 open-heart operations.

With a history dating back to the 1950s, The Carolinas Heart Institute is one of the most comprehensive cardiac treatment centers in the Southeast. It is the busiest transplant center in the Carolinas. CHI includes The Dickson Heart Unit, an intensive care unit for heart patients; the James Heineman Vascular Center; a Cardio-Vascular Recovery Unit; Heart Failure Center; the Heart Station where specialized testing occurs; and sophisticated clinical and basic medical research through the Cannon Research Center.

Carolinas Medical Center is an Academic Medical Center Teaching Hospital and the flagship facility of Carolinas HealthCare System, one of the largest public healthcare systems in the U.S.

Through compassionate patient care, innovative medical procedures and a strong sense of community, the Sanger Clinic has built a reputation of trust and stability in the Carolinas. Founded in 1946 by Paul W. Sanger MD, the Sanger Clinic has grown to include an impressive staff of adult and pediatric cardiologists, and cardiac, thoracic and vascular surgeons. With 11 locations in both North and South Carolina, the Sanger Clinic offers convenient access to heart care. For more information, visit our website at www.sangerclinic.com