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Press Release

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American Heart Month: Washington DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center's Transcatheter Valve Therapy (TVT) Offers New Hope to Many with Valvular Heart Disease

WASHINGTON, DC— A little over a year ago, many DC-area Veterans who were considered to have high risk or inoperable valvular heart disease had very few options and a dim prognosis. This changed when the Washington DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center expanded their established Valve program to offer Transcatheter Valve Therapy (TVT) to suitable Veteran candidates.

The VA transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) program allows surgeons from the Veterans Affairs Medical Center's Valve Clinic to offer TVT, a new minimally invasive procedure. With TVT, the replacement valve is positioned by a puncture in the groin and a small incision in the chest wall rather than an open heart procedure.

So far, the results are phenomenal. Of the 14 Veterans who have had the procedure, all have survived for over a year. The excellent outcomes are attributed to the Valve Clinic's team-base approach to patient analysis and follow-up.

Marine Corps Veteran Michael Sebastian has nothing but praise for the Valve Clinic and his heart surgeons. "Before the surgery, I couldn't make it from the parking lot to the hospital without stopping twice. Now, I feel great." Mr. Sebastian has been receiving health care at the medical center for more than 35 years. "The VA saved my life twice, how can you argue with that?"

According to Dr. Gregory Trachiotis, Chief, Cardiac Surgery and Director of the Heart Center, "TVT is a potential game changer for some Veterans who are considered too high-risk for traditional valve replacement therapy." He warns the procedure is not without risk and is not for every patient.

Potential TVT candidates undergo a rigorous evaluation, diagnostic testing, and preparation performed in the VA medical center's Valve Clinic. If deemed a candidate for TVT, the procedure is performed at The George Washington University Hospital by VA surgeons (through an affiliation agreement); the same surgeons and structural heart cardiologists whom the Veteran sees as part of the care team.

Although the procedure is fairly new, Dr. Trachiotis anticipates the program will continue to expand, as a state-of-the-art TVT Hybrid Operating Room is in the planning stage to be constructed at the VA facility.

In honor of American Heart Month, members of the media who wish to speak with a medical center subject matter expert about heart health or the new transcatheter valve therapy, please contact the Office of Public Affairs, 202-745-4037.