

## Delray Medical Center physician featured in Health Living Section

February 17, 2011

**Question:** What heart related procedures do you specialize in?

**Answer:** I specialize in minimally invasive mitral-valve repair and replacement — surgery which involves making a 2-inch incision but does not require dividing the sternum. It allows patients to go home in 48 hours instead of days or weeks.

In 2004, I invented and patented a mitralvalve repair device which allows surgeons to adjust the diameter of a valve repair after it is implanted. We implanted the device in 68 patients, with exceptional results.

At Delray Medical Center , we are very focused on minimally invasive procedures. We are one of the few to use the da Vinci robot for lung surgery and to specialize in catheter-based aneurism repair and 'beating heart' bypass surgery. We are the only center in Palm Beach County which does truly minimally invasive valve surgery, where there is no sternum incision.

Q: What's the biggest difference in your heart related care, compared to a decade ago?

A: Ten years ago, heart-surgery patients were in the hospital for 10 days to two weeks or more. Now our patients go home in 48 hours. Traditionally, patients were usually out of work or could not return to normal activity for months. Now you can be back to work or on the golf course in two weeks.

The amount of blood lost during surgery has also changed dramatically. Years ago, patients would routinely need transfusions; now there are none. People are much less afraid of having heart surgery now that the procedures are less invasive.

Q: Have any recent heart-related developments affected your program?

A: There is more awareness, and more people are asking to be evaluated for heart disease. The recent Barbara Walters interview, for example, helped to raise awareness about female cardiac disease,

which is very important. That's because women are much more concerned about breast cancer, but after menopause, a woman's risk of heart disease accelerates.

Q: What is the most memorable case you've dealt with recently?

A: I recently treated a 90-year-old patient who had atrial fibrillation and a leaking mitral valve. He was told he was too old to have surgery, but was really suffering. He could not walk more than 20 feet without becoming short of breath. I repaired his mitral valve and corrected his rhythm, surgically.

He called me the other day, asking when he can go back to the golf course. He told me he won't even be using the golf cart; he wants to walk the 18 holes. It shows you that even 90-year-olds can get through heart surgery these days and enjoy a much better life because of it.

Q: In regard to cardiac care and health, what is the biggest misconception that the public has?

A: The biggest misconceptions are that women do not have heart problems and that heart surgery is something to fear. People think they'll never be the same after heart surgery, and it's true — but in a good way! After surgery, many patients say their life has never been better.

Many people are dying as they wait to make a decision about whether they should have heart surgery, because they do not understand the process. The risks for an average, healthy, middleage person are not much more than the risks for a gall-bladder operation. The patient has to be well-informed, so talk to a heart surgeon before you decide whether to have surgery.

Q: Is there anything else about how you serve heart patients that you want to let Healthy Living readers know?

A: Don't fear mitralvalve surgery. Many people with mitral-valve disease worry that they will get a prosthetic valve. But there is a huge increase in mitral-valve repair; I repair 92 percent of mitral valves. A patient's natural valve is preserved, there is no prosthetic, and they don't have to be on coumadin, which increases bleeding risk. Ten years ago, mitral-valve repairs were very rare. Now they really have been perfected.

A Q&A with...

Dr. Richard Cartledge, M.D., FACS  
Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgeon