



Independence

HEALTH SYSTEM

TO MEDIA

CONTACT:

Tom Chakurda
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer
thomas.chakurda@independence.health
412-508-6816 CELL

Melissa Forster
Marketing & Communications Specialist
melissa.forster@independence.health
814-490-6057 CELL

Robin Jennings
robin.jennings@independence.health
724-516-4483 CELL

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INDEPENDENCE HEALTH SYSTEM CONTINUES TO ADVANCE CARDIOVASCULAR CAPABILITIES AND SURPASS BENCHMARKS

New Minimally Invasive Procedures Become Standard Of Care For Valve Repairs, Heart Defect Closures

GREENSBURG, PA, January 22, 2024 ... At the height of the pandemic in early 2021, interventional cardiologists in The Heart Center at Westmoreland Hospital, now part of Independence Health System, began offering minimally invasive aortic heart valve replacement. Among the benefits of Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR), is the abbreviated procedure time and the shortened hospital stay, both important considerations in the months when COVID-19 was at its peak and patients were delaying treatment for fear of infection. Now three years later, Independence Health System is celebrating the completion of 300 TAVRs and introducing new methods for dealing with other heart conditions including mitral valve abnormalities, and

small openings in the heart that may have been present at birth or developed over time.

“Our program continues to evolve in breadth and depth, and has pressed forward even in the face of a public health crisis,” noted cardiologist James Adisey, MD, medical director of the Heart and Vascular Institute at Independence Health System-Westmoreland area. “Heart disease and stroke don’t wait for conditions to improve; they are present every day. Patients count on us to be there in all circumstances with the best possible treatment options to improve their quality of life or save their life when necessary.”

TAVR is performed on patients with symptomatic, severe aortic stenosis (narrowing or restriction of blood flow) at low, intermediate or high risk for standard valve replacement surgery. Transcatheter Mitral Valve Repair or TMVR is indicated for patients whose mitral valves do not close properly. At Independence Health System-Westmoreland Area, that repair is now being made with a product called **MitraClip**. During TMVR, the small clip is attached to the mitral valve to help it close more completely, thus restoring better blood flow throughout the heart.

Other new procedures include patent foramen ovale closure and atrial septal defect closure. A patent foramen ovale (PFO) is a hole in the heart that didn’t close the way it should in the weeks after birth. It is a small flaplike opening between the upper heart chambers called the atria. Most people with PFO never know they have it or need treatment. However, in some cases, PFO closure is recommended to prevent clots from passing through the hole which could lead to recurring strokes. The repair is a same-day outpatient procedure.

A similar condition, atrial septal defect, also affects the upper chambers of the heart, but in this instance, the hole can cause blood to flow from the left atrium to the right atrium, increasing the workload of the heart and lungs. ASD closure can prevent or reduce the symptoms and complications of such a defect, including shortness of breath, fatigue, arrhythmia, heart failure, pulmonary hypertension as well as stroke.

All of these procedures are among skills a new interventional cardiologist offers to the patients of Independence Health System. Neeraj N. Shah, MD, comes to Independence Health System from East Carolina University/Vidant Medical Center, Greenville, North Carolina where he was part of the structural heart interventions team.

Dr. Shah’s education and training are extensive. He completed fellowships in

cardiology, interventional cardiology and structural heart diseases, training at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, Lehigh Valley Health Network and Main Line Health, both in Pennsylvania. Beyond his expertise in matters of the heart, Dr. Shah also holds a Master's degree in Public Health.

A Diplomate of the American Board of Internal Medicine, Dr. Shah is board certified in internal medicine, cardiovascular disease and interventional cardiology. A member of the American College of Cardiology, he holds certificates from American Society of Nuclear Cardiology, the Society of Cardiovascular Computerized Tomography and the American Society of Echocardiography.

“We are extremely fortunate to attract Dr. Shah to our program,” noted fellow interventional cardiologist Nevin Baker, DO, FACC, FSCAI. “Optimal treatment is based on a multidisciplinary approach and Independence Health System has a robust team that includes cardiothoracic surgeons, interventional cardiologists, cardiovascular imagers, cardiac anesthesiologists and nurse navigators all focusing on one goal – the best patient outcome.”

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Nationally recognized for quality care, Independence Health System comprises Butler Memorial, Clarion, Frick, Latrobe and Westmoreland Hospitals with a combined bed count of 925. With more than 1,000 physicians and advanced practice providers and 7,300 employees, the System is now the third largest in western Pennsylvania serving a population base of 750,000 in a footprint spanning more than 10 counties.

The System includes tertiary programs that are rated among America's best for cardiac care and surgery by Healthgrades in its Top 100 designations. In similar fashion, the prestigious Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) bestowed its top three-star rating. Historically, less than 10 percent of programs within the STS data base achieve this elite standing. The hospitals of Independence Health System also have earned a host of accolades from such prestigious outlets and sources as US News and World Report, Newsweek Magazine, the American College of Radiology, the American College of Cardiology, the American College of Surgeons, the Joint Commission, Leapfrog and the American Heart/Stroke Association.

Locally owned and locally controlled, Independence Health System offers its patients low-cost, high-quality care across the care spectrum in such specialties as cardiology, cardiovascular and thoracic surgery, orthopedics and sports medicine, minimally invasive and robotic surgery, women's health and obstetrics, emergency medicine, behavioral health and primary care. Its network of outpatient centers sees more than 1.2 million visits annually. The homecare division further supports patients at all stages of life with home health and hospice services.

Independence Health System continues to change the healthcare landscape in western Pennsylvania by meeting patient needs through superb physician expertise, outstanding nursing, the latest in technology and programmatic depth.

