

Originally published in UMass Memorial Health/ UMass Memorial Medical Center's MC4U Weekly Update

Monday, June 10, 2024

100-Year-Old Patient 'Fortunate to Be in Era of Medical Miracles'



Grateful patient Margery Dearborn, center, with Nikolaos Kakouros, MD, PhD, left, and Jennifer Walker, MD

At the age of 100, Margery Dearborn of Worcester is looking ahead at what she calls a new chapter in her life. The centenarian underwent a successful [Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement, or TAVR](#), on Tuesday, April 22, just days after her 100th birthday. She thanked caregivers during a follow-up appointment this week. "Early in the fall, I started feeling breathless occasionally and it just got worse. By December, I was hospitalized. I really was thinking, 'I've had a good life, if this is the end, this is the end. It's alright.'" But doctors assured Margery they could operate, and she would undergo a TAVR procedure. "I'm so fortunate to be in the era of medical miracles with a miracle worker here at the hospital," Margery said.

Surgeons call it a game changer, especially for patients like Margery. Ten years ago, she would have likely undergone a far more invasive open-heart procedure instead.

"When transcatheter became available, it provided an opportunity to very minimally invasively put a valve in patients who would never have had the opportunity to live out their life expectancy with a new valve," said Jennifer Walker, MD, cardiac surgeon, and Surgical Director of the Structural Heart Program. "She might have been eligible [for open heart surgery] but it's a long recovery from open heart surgery. It's usually four or five days in the hospital, six weeks for the breastbone to heal and almost three months for a complete recovery, whereas a transcatheter valve, most people will go home the next day and we don't have to put them under general anesthesia."

During the procedure, a small incision is made either in a patient's leg or chest, and a catheter is inserted into the artery and guided to the heart. A new heart valve is then positioned inside the diseased valve with guidance from special imaging equipment. The valve is implanted, opening the narrowing and allowing blood to flow easily out of the patient's heart to the rest of the body.

"That means we're working on a beating heart. We're doing it with a catheter, so through the skin which means we don't have to stop the heart, we don't have to put the patient on the heart-lung bypass machine, we don't have to cut the chest open," said Nikolaos Kakouros, MD, Medical Director of the Structural Heart Program. "She's very lovely and very full of energy. We were very pleased that we were able to offer her this therapy."

Days after the procedure, Margery was back home and hosting a cheese tasting with friends.

"I live in an assisted living area and I have a lot of friends there. One of my daughters sent me as a birthday present, a big chest of smelly cheese from France," she said. "The only friends who were invited to this cheese tasting were those who like smelly cheese and it was terribly smelly, but wonderful and fun."

Besides her affinity for smelly cheeses from France, Margery's passion lies in architecture and preservation. She graduated from Smith College and later the Harvard Graduate School of Design to become an architect. When the "love

of her life" returned from overseas during World War II, the two married and raised their five children together before he passed away. She would later go on to found Preservation Worcester - which has grown from a volunteer group into a nonprofit that works toward maintaining significant sights and structures in the city of Worcester.

A self-described survivor, Margery will return for a one year follow up to her TAVR procedure.

"I'm an optimist. I also count my blessings and I'm very lucky. With those three attributes, here I am."

