

Heartfelt

Redford woman is one of first transplant patients at Botsford

By DIANE GALE ANDREASSI
SPECIAL WRITER



After more than a year of denying she had heart trouble, Sandy Garbarino realized she either had to seek help or die.

"I had trouble accepting it and I didn't go for treatment the first year," Garbarino said. "It's a very scary feeling. You're listening to what they're saying, but it doesn't hit you right away. Then it got so bad, I went to emergency at Botsford and met Dr. Levine."

That decision marked the beginning of a new life with a new heart for the Redford Township woman, one of the first patients at the Michigan Institute for Heart Failure and Transplant Care at Botsford Hospital.

Dr. T. Barry Levine is director of the institute, which represents a new medium for medicine that brings the experts and facilities out of their ivory towers and big cities to the communities where sick people live.

The institute is the only free-standing heart failure and transplant center in the United States.

Garbarino was able to receive all her preparatory and post-operative care a few miles from her house. The actual heart transplant was June 29, 1998, at the Cleveland Clinic.

"The institute is a dream and a vision in the next step in health care," Levine said.

"It's based on taking centers of expertise and moving them from isolated academic environments and tertiary care facilities and bringing them to the people and doctors."

Symptoms of disease

In 1996, at 49 years old, Garbarino knew something had gone terribly wrong.

She had trouble breathing and couldn't finish the smallest tasks. After a visit to an emergency room, Garbarino was told she had a bleeding ulcer and congestive heart failure. A heart monitor told doctors that her heart was weak and regularly stopped beating. A transplant

was her only hope.

She was immediately admitted to Botsford Hospital and began a series of blood tests, chest X-rays and psychological reviews to make sure she could emotionally handle the trauma of a new heart. Then she was taken by ambulance to the Cleveland Clinic where she waited for one month for the next available heart.

The only information Garbarino has regarding the donor is that her heart came from a woman who lived and died in Chicago.

In Michigan last year, there were 60 heart transplants, compared to 120 transplants at the Cleveland Clinic during that same time.

"It took me awhile to accept the fact that that was the way I had to get a heart," Garbarino said.

"I'm very grateful to the donor. I don't think I want to know the age of the patient, I think it would bother me if it was a young donor, but I couldn't be more grateful for what she and her family did for me and my family."

A real estate appraiser, Garbarino returned home and received the remaining of her extensive followup care at the institute. At first, she had a biopsy done weekly, then every two weeks, then once a month and finally after six months she now needs followup care every two or three months.

Off of work on medical leave, Garbarino plans to return once she gains more strength, especially in her legs, which are weak and hinder her from going up and down stairs. While she gets stronger, and in fact, for the rest of her life, Garbarino plans to continue going to the institute, which opened in a hospital wing, previously used for the emergency room, in September 1997.

About the institute

That date marked a dream

come true for Levine and Dr. Robert Stomel, Botsford chief of cardiology and director of the Institute of Cardiovascular Health, who wanted to build a bridge between the academic world of studies to the doctors treating patients.

"It is meant to bring our clinical program for heart failure treatment and education facility to the community where the people are," said Levine, a professor of medicine at the University of Michigan who worked for 10 years at Henry Ford Hospital and 10 years at the University of Minnesota.

"New insights develop and never germinate, because of an inherent bias, between academic medicine where you think scholarly thoughts and physicians on the front line," he said. "There can be a lack of communication between these two environments, because of barriers between the town and the gown. We've taken the best of the academic world and taken it to the best of the clinical world and pushed forward with this concept."

The institute has 500 some patients. Last year, six institute patients had heart transplants.

"Seven out of eight people referred to us for heart transplants don't need transplants," explained Levine, who stresses the importance of exhausting all other treatments first.

In the last seven years, the number of people donating their organs has remained constant, he said. Rather than look to increase the supply, he is working to limit the demand by making his patients' hearts healthier.

"Surgery is one aspect of the solution," Levine said. "There are other ways of dealing with the problem and we're exploring the full gamut."

Consider that some 80 percent of patients who visit emergency rooms with heart failure are admitted for hospital stays, Levine said, adding that last year, \$40 billion was spent on heart patient treatments in the United States and 60 percent of that represented hospital stays.



STAFF PHOTO BY BOB BERNARD

Consultation: Dr. Barry T. Levine of the Michigan Institute of Heart Failure and Transplant Care at Botsford Hospital discusses follow-up care with Sandy Garbarino of Redford Township.

Limiting hospital stays not only saves money, but keeps his patients happier.

Treatment options

Referring to a patient who came to his office experiencing heart failure earlier in the morning, Levine said, he was able to adjust her treatment and send her home.

"I said: 'Here's what you can do at home and I'll see you tomorrow.'"

Other members of the institute have launched a home visit program with patients who have a hard time getting around, but still want the comfort of living at home. The institute also conducts research on new treat-

ments with willing patients. In fact, last year 18 papers on research conducted at the Institute were published in medical journals.

"A lot of what we're doing today is based on work that was done 10 years ago," Levine said.

The institute not only offers residents educational programs, like "Heart to Heart" and "Mended Heart," monthly support groups, but last year also provided more than a dozen seminars and lectures for doctors to keep them current about new developments.

"What makes us so unique is the fact that if you talk to transplant centers around the country, they make money doing

transplants," Levine said. "We can act as true advocates for the patient offering them the best and most appropriate care without subtle implications of finding people for transplants."

Meanwhile, the institute saved Garbarino long trips seeking treatment in other communities.

"At Botsford, with Dr. Levine, I had excellent treatment," she said. "They knew the ups and downs of it and saw me through it along with my family and friends. I never felt like just a number there, they were very caring. It made me live. The support and the knowledge that the people have, I felt very secure with it."



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<p>SESSION I - 9:45-10:45 a.m.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Stretch Out Stress</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Prayer and Personal Wholeness</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Estate Planning</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Coronary Artery Disease</p>	<p>SESSION II - 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Come to Your Senses</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Energy Work and Grounding Techniques</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Eat Right, Stay Healthy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Coronary Artery Disease</p>
<p>SESSION III - 1:15-2:15 p.m.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Stretch Out Stress</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Energy Work and Grounding Techniques</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Eat Right, Stay Healthy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mechanics 101</p>	<p>WRAP UP - 2:30-3:30 p.m.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Creativity "No Limits" (Everyone attends)</p>

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