

The Beat Goes On

Heart Transplant Program Reignites at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center

OSF HealthCare is excited to announce a successful start to the heart transplant program at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, Illinois.

The first heart transplant in this reignited program occurred Saturday, February 27. The heart recipient, myocarditis patient John Wlodarchak, 24, was discharged just 12 days post-surgery on March 11.

Dozens of OSF HealthCare Mission Partners lined the hallway to cheer Wlodarchak on, as he confidently walked out of the adult heart unit at OSF Saint Francis.

"I feel great," smiled Wlodarchak. "Two weeks ago I was out of breath just walking to the bathroom, and now I can walk a half mile at a time and I'm not even winded."

John's mother, Carol Wlodarchak, says she has been amazed by his quick recovery. "Amazing," she remarked. "John is – I see progress every day. He was so critically sick a couple weeks ago, and now said he walked a mile around the halls yesterday."

Emmanuel Amulraj, M.D., the heart transplant surgical director at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center says the six-hour surgery went just as expected. He says the teamwork that has brought the program to this point has been inspiring.

"This gave us an opportunity with a multi-disciplinary approach, where all the different teams - the OR team, the ICU team, cardiology, the heart failure team - to come to work toward one vision, one goal," said Dr. Amulraj. "It was very nice coordination. It's been wonderful to see how people step up to the plate."

This heart transplant program is the only one in central and downstate Illinois, making OSF Saint Francis a destination center for both transplants and ventricular assist device procedures (VAD), offering patients a second chance to celebrate the gift of life.

"Now patients don't have to go anywhere," explained Barry Clemson, M.D., Heart Failure Medical Director, OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute. "Patients can get their heart transplant and heart failure care in their own backyard, close to home, close to their family, so they have all the support and all the things they need to get better, and to get through their illness."

The heart transplantation program at OSF Saint Francis was first established in 1987 and suspended in 2007 due to decreasing volume and physician retirements. Over its 19-year duration, the program successfully completed 208 heart transplants.

"It's amazing to know that we have been able to revive this program, to rebuild it, basically from scratch. It's taken five years of time, and work, and effort, and commitment from the institution and the Sisters and all the administration of OSF to get this job done. And then we had to put the team together, and the team is phenomenal," says Dr. Clemson.

The heart transplant program relies completely on organ donations.

Twenty-two people die every day while waiting for an organ transplant. However, one organ donor can save eight lives.

Many states, like Illinois, have made becoming an organ donor an easy process. You simply have to indicate on your driver's license that you'd like to be one.

Dr. Amulraj says it's the best gift you can possibly give.

"Just knowing that somebody's legacy moves on as we pass on, we are still able to give the gift of life on our way out. That's the beauty of transplant. It gives everybody a second chance to celebrate life," he reflected.

Carol Wlodarchak couldn't agree more. "Do it. It was such a generous donation, and lifesaving. To see the difference in less than two weeks in his overall health and condition, amazing. Amazing. And I can't stress enough to check the box."

Heart transplant capabilities add to the [transplant services](#) already offered at OSF Saint Francis, as it is currently a designated transplant center for other organs.