

Of Heart and Home

Minimally invasive heart surgery now
available in Salina **BY JOHN BERGGREN**

Marilyn Odermann, 74, of McPherson, had known she had a heart murmur for several years. The finding came up in a routine physical exam with her primary doctor.

She was referred to Salina cardiologist Karil Bellah, MD, to have the condition more closely evaluated. Bellah recommended Odermann take a wait-and-see approach. Her murmur was caused by a leaky mitral valve, but it wasn't bad enough to require immediate attention. As long as she remained free of symptoms, they decided to monitor the situation annually.

This summer, however, during Odermann's annual cardiology appointment, Bellah noted a significant decline in her heart's function. An appointment was set with Richard Toon, MD, a new cardiothoracic surgeon at Salina Regional Health Center, to evaluate her for surgery.

"It was really something," Odermann says. "I'd never had any symptoms until after my appointment with Dr. Bellah, but before my meeting with Dr. Toon. All of a sudden, while my daughter was over one day, boom, it was like a ton of bricks hit my chest. I couldn't catch my breath. It eventually got better, but then I had another episode like that and my

family convinced me to see if I could get an appointment sooner. They got me right in."

Timing couldn't have been better for Odermann. Toon had just begun offering minimally invasive heart surgeries in Salina. He'd performed many minimally invasive procedures in Wichita and Iowa before he began full-time practice in Salina last summer.

BENEFITS OF MINIMALLY INVASIVE SURGERY

Traditional heart valve replacement surgery requires the breastbone to be cracked, with a long incision running down the entire length of the chest. Minimally invasive surgeries use a much smaller incision—about 4 inches—either on the right side of the rib cage or under the left armpit, depending on the location of the valve needing replaced. The surgeon is able to spread

the ribs just enough to create a window to complete the surgery.

"Many places do minimally invasive surgery and many places don't," Toon says. "It just depends on where the surgeon's comfort lies. Technically the procedure is a little more difficult for the surgeon, but the outcomes are much easier on patients."

Benefits of minimally invasive heart surgery include less trauma and blood loss,

shorter hospitalization, quicker recovery times, less risk of infection and better cosmetic outcomes.

Odermann and Toon chose to use a tissue valve from a pig to replace her leaky mitral valve. Toon also tied off a natural appendage in Odermann's heart to reduce the risk for a future stroke and performed a Cox-Maze ablation procedure to correct a slight atrial fibrillation defect.

Some patients may opt for a man-made mechanical valve when replacement is needed.

"The advantage to mechanical valves is that they never wear out," Toon says. "The disadvantage is that patients with mechanical valves are required to be on blood thinners for the rest of their lives. There are risks that go along with those blood thinners, such as internal bleeding from a fall. With tissue valves, you can usually eliminate the need for blood thinners."

Not every patient is a candidate for minimally invasive surgery, however. Patients who have had previous thoracic surgeries or patients who are having a bypass along with a valve replacement will still require the traditional open surgery.

SMOOTH RECOVERY

Odermann went home six days after surgery and through it all she experienced little pain.

"I don't know if it was the pain medicine that worked so well or if I was just fortunate, but I never really had any pain," Odermann says. "I felt an ache a time or two after I'd reach for something, but really it was all very minimal."

Rehabilitation therapists had her up and walking and doing stairs in a matter of days while she was still in the hospital. She continued cardiac rehabilitation once she got back home to McPherson.

"I'd always been a walker and they said that made a big difference in my recovery," Odermann says. "My dad had heart surgery in 1974 and he had the big open surgery. He had to hug a pillow if he had to cough [to reduce stress on the incision site]. This was a totally different experience."

"I think we're very fortunate to have Dr. Toon in our area as someone with the knowledge of doing these minimally invasive procedures," Odermann says. "He acted like the whole thing was a piece of cake and he knew exactly what needed to be done. That gave me a lot of confidence right off the bat. It couldn't have gone better." ■



Richard Toon, MD

A woman with short grey hair and glasses stands in a grassy yard. She is wearing a dark blue jacket with red sleeves and green chest pockets, a yellow vertical stripe down the front, a white collar, a black t-shirt, blue jeans, and blue sneakers. In the background, there is a brick house and greenery.

Call

BREATHE EASIER

If you need a heart valve replacement, ask whether minimally invasive surgery might be an option for you. Call the Heart Center at Salina Regional Health Center at [785-452-7562](tel:785-452-7562) for more information.

Marilyn Odermann, of McPherson, was one of the first patients to undergo minimally invasive heart valve replacement surgery in Salina.