

New Year, New Heart

72-Year-Old Veteran Receives Heart Transplant on New Year's Eve

By Christina Johnson | January 20, 2015

Many of us may plan to turn over a new leaf in 2015, but 72-year-old veteran Roger Knott already has a whole change of heart, literally. Knott, a former Navy ship driver and volunteer on the USS Midway Museum, received a heart transplant on New Year's Eve.

The transplant took place at Sulpizio Cardiovascular Center at UC San Diego Health, where Knott has been a patient since 2012. The operation took ten-hours and ended around 10:00 a.m. on Jan. 1, making it the first completed heart transplant in 2015 in San Diego County and the 54th performed at UC San Diego Health since 2010.



But most importantly, the transplant has breathed life into a man who now has many plans for the future.

"This heart is freedom and a chance to get back in the water with my grandchildren," said Knott, who is an avid sailor and waterman.

Knott first came to UC San Diego Health in 2012 – by air ambulance – following a massive heart attack in Las Vegas, where he then lived, and a triple bypass surgery that failed to restore normal heart function.

"The doctor in Las Vegas told me that I could either write Roger's obituary or go to San Diego," said Knott's wife of 33 years, Carol Knott. The doctor urged the couple to seek more advanced cardiovascular treatment options at UC San Diego Health.

UC San Diego Health doctors were able to stabilize Knott's condition. "But, it was clear that Roger was not going to get better without a heart transplant," said [Eric Adler, MD](#), medical director of Cardiac Transplant and Mechanical Circulatory Support. "We knew a heart transplant offered him a better quality of life and probably a longer life."

Knott was put on a transplant waiting list and was kept alive in the interim by a mechanical titanium pump, known as a left ventricular assist device or LVAD. [Victor Pretorius, MBChB](#), surgical director of the Cardiac Transplant and Mechanical Circulatory Support, performed the LVAD operation in 2013. Under the leadership of Adler and Pretorius, UC San Diego Health performed 19 heart transplants in 2014, more than any year prior.

The mechanical pump, which helps a weak heart circulate blood to the aorta, allowed Knott to return to his volunteering on the USS Midway Museum.

“Within six weeks, I was climbing ladders and making presentations again,” Knott said.

Overweight most of his adult life, the device also helped him shed 55 pounds.

“We are doing more heart transplants than ever before,” Adler said. “What we are seeing is that LVAD devices not only help keep patients alive, they can help patients gain strength going into the transplant surgery.”

The Knott’s were at the airport on the morning of New Year’s Eve, headed for Ohio, when the call came that a donor heart might become available. Knott left the boarding gate and walked into the hospital that afternoon. By 10 p.m., he was on the operating table.

[Eugene Golts, MD](#), cardiothoracic surgeon, and [Michael Madani, MD](#), chief of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery, and director of Sulpizio Cardiovascular Center – Surgery, performed the New Year’s transplant.

The challenge of the surgery was dealing with the scar tissue from his two previous open-heart operations. “It was like trying to cut through a football without popping the balloon on the inside,” Golts said. “It makes it more dangerous for the patient.”

The first few days after an operation are always a critical time, but Knott was able to stand and take a few steps two days after his transplant.

“This is a function of the LVAD, and that he was able to walk into the hospital for his transplant,” Pretorius said.

Knott went for his first walk outdoors on Friday, Jan. 9 and was discharged from the hospital last week.

“Best holiday gift this year?” his daughter-in-law posted on Facebook. “My father-in-law getting a new heart. Thank you to the person looking down on us who donated their heart.”

Details about the donor are kept anonymous, but Knott can write a letter to the grieving family that medical professionals can then pass on.

“I need to repay this family by taking good care of their loved one’s heart,” Knott said. “My offer is to invite them to tour the *Midway* and let them see what their loved one’s heart is experiencing

through my eyes.”

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