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Heart of the Matter

Children's Mercy Hospital

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Heart of the matter

CMH approved to perform heart transplants, adds 2 new doctors to lead team

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The Ward Family Heart Center at Children's Mercy has received approval to begin performing pediatric heart transplants, making it the first healthcare facility in the Kansas City region to offer the life-saving procedure to pediatric patients.

"The community has been underserved in the area of pediatric heart transplants and that is about to change," said Dr. Randall O'Donnell, President and CEO. "We have built a gifted team of experienced cardiac and transplant surgeons, physicians, nurses and support staff. We've always provided the pre- and post-transplant care for patients from our region, but now, patients will have the benefit of receiving their transplant closer to home. This is important for families so they don't have to be separated from their support system. They will receive the highest quality of cardiac care right here, at home."



Addie Ward (center), leading benefactor of the Ward Family Heart Center, was pleased to announce the establishment of the new heart transplant program and the arrival of Dr. Barnes (left) and Dr. St. Louis.

Children's Mercy received approval for its pediatric heart transplant program from the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), a nonprofit group that oversees organ allocation and transplant programs under a contract with the federal government.

Leading the Children's Mercy heart transplant team are two nationally recognized experts:

James D. St. Louis, MD, is a board-certified thoracic and cardiac surgeon with more than 15 years of pediatric experience. Dr. St. Louis previously was the Director of Pediatric Cardiac Transplantation at the University of Minnesota Amplatz Children's Hospital.

Aliessa P. Barnes, MD, is a board-certified pediatric cardiologist specializing in pediatric heart failure and pediatric cardiac transplantation. Dr. Barnes has 10 years of experience, the past five as Medical Director of Heart Transplantation at Children's Medical Center, Dallas.

Children's Mercy also will offer for the first time ventricular assist devices (VADs), critical to support pediatric heart transplant patients as they wait for a new heart.

"The reality is that there is a limited supply of pediatric donors and pediatric donor hearts," said Girish Shirali, MBBS, FACC, FASE, Co-Director of the Ward Family Heart Center. "This means our patients may need to wait for extended lengths of time for that gift to become available. In order to support our patients in every way possible, a transplant facility also must have expertise and resources to implant mechanical hearts, or ventricular assist devices, to help the patient remain stable while they wait."

Children's Mercy currently provides cardiology care for 50 to 60 heart failure patients, some of whom may eventually need a heart transplant, as well as 20 to 25 post-transplant patients. When the hospital's outcomes are compared to the combined averages of the 114 North American children's hospitals contributing to the Society of Thoracic Surgeons National Congenital Heart Surgery Database, they are among the best.

"We have been performing pediatric heart surgeries for more than 50 years," said Jim O'Brien, MD, FACS, Co-Director of the Ward Family Heart Center. "As a high-volume center, what is unusual at other hospitals is common for our experienced team, whose outcomes are among the best in the country."

Last year, the hospital's team performed more than 450 surgical heart procedures, provided more than 15,000 cardiac outpatient visits, and conducted more than 15,000 echocardiograms and more than 500 catheterization and electrophysiology procedures.

As a comprehensive transplant center, Children's Mercy also provides kidney, liver, intestinal, bone marrow and stem cell transplants.

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