Experience Counts for “Miracle Man”

In Weston, Florida, a 53-year-old businessman, Jose Amalio Torres, has acquired a new nickname – “the miracle man.”

That’s what his physicians in Florida are calling him after his life was saved at the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center.

“It was an extremely complicated case,” says Gosta Pettersson, M.D., Mr. Torres’ surgeon. But there was no magic involved in saving Mr. Torres’ life. No new technology. He was saved by old-fashioned virtues: experience, professionalism, and a surgical team that has seen everything that can possibly go wrong in the human heart – and knows how to fix it.

Mr. Torres was in deep trouble when he came to the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center. He had severe mitral valve endocarditis. This condition occurs when germs enter the bloodstream and attack the lining of the heart valves. Infective endocarditis causes growths or holes on the valve or scarring of the valve tissue, most

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Live! Internet Health Talk

On Saturday, Feb. 26, top heart surgeons from The Cleveland Clinic will talk about the hottest topics in heart care on a special live national symposium.

You’ll hear the latest from….

Bruce Lytle, M.D., chairman of the Department of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery

Marc Gillinov, M.D., on atrial fibrillation

Joseph Sabik, M.D., on coronary artery disease

Tomislav Mihaljevic, M.D., on minimally invasive valve surgery

…and more top Cleveland Clinic Heart Center experts!

For information/registration, call 216/444-3641 or 800/548-8502, or visit www.clevelandclinic.org/health. Click on “health talks”

You’ll find all the information you need to be part of this exciting Web event!

Jose Amalio Torres (seated, right) has a new perspective on life, thanks to a life-saving surgery performed at the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center. He is pictured here with his wife and two sons, Josiel (left) and Joselin (right).
Experience Counts
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often resulting in a leaky heart valve. Without treatment, it is fatal.

Mr. Torres’ first stop had been Cleveland Clinic Florida, located near his home in Weston, where his condition was diagnosed by Margaret Gorensek, M.D., and Gian Novaro, M.D. They referred him for surgery to Dr. Pettersson, at the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center in Ohio.

Hovering between life and death, Mr. Torres was flown to Cleveland for examination. Although he remembers little of those days, his family cannot forget them.

“There was a point where we thought he was not going to make it,” says his wife, Elina. “My only hope was the belief that God was going to help us.”

Dr. Pettersson examined Mr. Torres and explained the gravity of his condition. “In many cases of endocarditis, antibiotics alone can cure the infection,” says Dr. Pettersson. “However, in about 25 to 30 percent of patients, surgery is needed during the early acute phase of infection.”

Dr. Pettersson notes that in addition to his patient’s mitral valve problems, “a CT scan of the brain revealed that he had suffered a number of small strokes, often associated with infective endocarditis.”

Ordinarily, when a patient suffers a stroke of any intensity, surgery needs to be postponed. But Mr. Torres wasn’t responding to antibiotic treatment. His kidneys were damaged. “He was too sick to wait,” says Dr. Pettersson.

Any surgery for endocarditis is very specialized and demanding. It requires extensive experience and familiarity with different methods of reconstructing the valve. Removal of infected tissue deep in the heart is technically difficult. In addition, transesophageal echocardiograms need to be performed before, during and after surgery to help guide the surgeon and ensure that the valve is working properly.

But Dr. Pettersson and his team had a crucial advantage. The Cleveland Clinic Heart Center is one of the most experienced heart centers in the world. While other centers may see advanced and highly complex cases once in a while, surgeons like Dr. Pettersson see them every day.

In a notably complex operation, Dr. Pettersson and his team scoured bacterial growth from inside and outside the heart, reconstructed the ring around the mitral valve with a patch of the outer covering of the patient’s heart, and replaced the mitral valve with an artificial valve made of biological material.

Mr. Torres spent almost a month
Heart disease patients with “normal” blood pressure can dramatically reduce the risk of adverse cardiac events like heart attack and stroke by taking medication that lowers their blood pressure. At the same time, they will be slowing, even stopping the progression of their cardiovascular disease.

These are the findings of a new Cleveland Clinic Heart Center-led study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

“This is the first study to demonstrate that blood pressure reduction can slow or halt the buildup of plaque in the coronary arteries,” says Steven Nissen, M.D., the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center cardiologist who led the study. “Previously, only cholesterol-lowering drugs have been shown to slow disease progression. The current study demonstrates that blood pressure-lowering drugs produce similar benefits.”

In the CAMELOT trial, researchers enrolled patients with coronary heart disease and an average blood pressure of 129/78, which was once considered “normal.” Patients were given one of two types of blood pressure-lowering drugs or a placebo (a sugar pill).

After two years of treatment with the antihypertensive drug amlodipine, a drug in a class known as calcium channel blockers, patients experienced a 31-percent reduction in major adverse cardiovascular events, including heart attack, stroke, death, hospitalization for chest pain and the need for angioplasty or bypass surgery.

“The CAMELOT study demonstrates the critical importance of lowering blood pressure in patients with heart disease,” says Dr. Nissen. “It suggests that current guidelines do not go far enough in recommendations for blood pressure targets in patients with coronary disease.”
Have you been advised to change your eating habits because of high cholesterol? High blood pressure? Weight? Does heart disease run in your family? Would you like to protect yourself? You can now get a customized nutritional plan designed just for you – online from The Cleveland Clinic.

A new remote nutrition counseling service can connect you to a registered dietitian at the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center who will provide you with step-by-step instructions on how a healthy diet can help reduce your risk factors related to heart disease and other health-related disorders. The fee-based service is part of e-Cleveland Clinic’s new MyConsult service.

“We designed this service to be a comprehensive nutrition program that assists individuals in adopting healthy diet and lifestyle patterns that can positively impact their health,” says Melissa Ohlson, M.S., R.D., L.D., a registered dietitian in the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center’s Department of Preventive Cardiology and Rehabilitation. “Using our extensive experience in heart disease risk reduction, our dietitians can assess an individual’s nutritional needs and offer advice that will make a real difference on more than their waistline.”

The counseling service is made possible by the e-Cleveland Clinic e-health services program, which allows patients to request e-health services online, anytime, from virtually anywhere in the world. Patients seeking nutritional guidance can receive personalized nutrition recommendations without taking time from work, home or family. Because this service is available through a secure Web environment, information can be requested and received from the privacy of the patient’s home. Each remote nutrition consultation is unique to an individual’s personal medical history, food preference and circumstance. As a result, nutrition assessments are thorough, relevant and focused, providing rational, medically sound nutrition advice that can be easily understood and implemented. Coupled with resources such as grocery shopping guides, access to the Cleveland Clinic Health Information Center, and detailed nutrition tips, the service is a powerful resource that can help set an individual on the road to success.

“To a great degree,” adds Ms. Ohlson, “good health is a product of the choices we make every day about what we eat, how much we exercise, and how knowledgeable we are about our own risks for disease. Our energy level, ability to concentrate and manage our weight, blood sugar and cholesterol – these are but just a few of the many conditions that can be favorably influenced when we provide our bodies with the right mix of nutrients, in the right amounts.”

To begin the process of getting your nutritional plan, go to www.eclevelandclinic.org, pull down the menu “My Consult” and go to “Nutrition.”