

BroadcastMed | Heart Surgery Alternative

SPEAKER 1: Live from the CBS Bay Area studios, this is KPIX 5 News.

KEN BASTIDA: Doctors call it a safer alternative to open-heart surgery. Now many more patients are able to avoid going under the knife. How a tiny tube is making a huge difference in heart valve replacement.

New at 6, taking the surgery out of open-heart surgery. The FDA is allowing more people to take advantage of an option that avoids the risk of going under the knife.

VERONICA DE LA CRUZ: KPIX 5's John Ramos on the tiny tube that could be a game changer for heart valve replacement.

JOHN RAMOS: The heart is an amazing machine. From the moment we're born to the day we die, it beats on without rest. But around age 70, the valves can start to harden and fail and if not replaced, will usually lead to the end of life. That's what Russ Sherman was facing.

RUSS SHERMAN: Open-heart surgery sounds awfully drastic to me. I mean, I've had a lot of surgeries but that sounds-- that would be the worst.

JOHN RAMOS: But now, Russ has an option straight out of a science fiction movie.

SPEAKER 2: Actually entering inside the human body.

JOHN RAMOS: The 1966 film, "Fantastic Voyage," took moviegoers on a journey to repair the human body from within. That very thing is happening here at the Cardiovascular Institute at John Muir Hospital in Concord. It's called transcatheter aortic valve replacement or TAVR. With a single injection in the groin area, doctors guide a tiny tube up an artery and into the heart. It contains a replacement valve compressed within a steel mesh sleeve. Once it has been positioned precisely, the magic happens.

SPEAKER 3: Here it goes.

JOHN RAMOS: A balloon expands the sleeve into the old valve and the new one immediately begins to work. No suturing is required, and best of all, the heart is never stopped and the chest is never opened. In fact, the patient is semi-conscious through the whole thing.

RAMESH VEERAGANDHAM: The same thing can be done. The same goal can be achieved with a much better and much faster recovery for the patient. It is a lot more safer.

JOHN RAMOS: It's changing the very idea of replacing valves with open-heart surgery.

NEIL WHITE: If you're a candidate for this procedure, it's the best way to replace your heart valve because you don't have to have your chest opened and go on bypass.

JOHN RAMOS: And now it's available to a lot more candidates. One in every eight people who reach age 70 experience heart-valve failure, but the FDA originally approved TAVR only for patients too fragile for open-heart surgery. But it's been so successful that about three weeks ago, it was approved for thousands of people in the intermediate risk category, including guys like Russ Sherman.

TANVEER KHAN: His valve function will be as if he has a new valve-- you know, just as good as the one he started with.

RUSS SHERMAN: I'm going to be younger.

JOHN RAMOS: A new lease on life, right?

RUSS SHERMAN: Absolutely. They're going to give me back five years, maybe more.

JOHN RAMOS: In Concord, John Ramos, KPIX 5.

VERONICA DE LA CRUZ: Now the difference in recovery time is remarkable. Open-heart surgery normally takes a month or more to recover. But his doctors say it's possible Rush Sherman can go back to his job next week.