

March 20, 1997

Carolinas Heart Institute Begins "Port-Access™" Heart Surgery

A Carolinas Heart Institute and Sanger Clinic Surgeon has performed Charlotte's first Port-Access™ heart surgery, a new, minimally invasive procedure designed to bring patients improvement in the pain and recovery that normally accompanies major cardiac operations. The patient is William McNeely of Charlotte who underwent a double by-pass operation on Tuesday.

Port-Access technology allows surgeons to perform a wide range of complex heart repairs through small incisions, or "ports," in the chest wall between the ribs. This eliminates the need to saw open and pry apart the breastbone to reach the heart, which is one of the most traumatic aspects of conventional heart surgery. Carolinas Heart Institute surgeons believe that the Port-Access approach may reduce the pain, trauma and complications of heart surgery, reduce scarring, shorten hospital stay, and speed recovery.

"We expect patients to be able to resume their normal activities much more quickly with the Port-Access approach," said Eric R. Skipper, M.D., the surgeon who performed the procedure. "Many patients should be able to leave the hospital in three or four days, and recover fully in two to three weeks." With conventional heart surgery, patients often remain in the hospital for a week or more and then convalesce at home for as much as two to three months.

Dr. Skipper has now performed three Port-Access surgeries to correct blocked coronary arteries, and plans to do a mitral valve replacement within the next week. The Port-Access method is being used to perform multi-vessel bypass operations involving three or four heart arteries, the most common form of heart surgery.

Port-Access surgery incorporates what many surgeons consider the most important advantage of traditional cardiac surgery, namely stopping and protecting the heart and supporting the patient's circulation with cardiopulmonary bypass (via a heart-lung

machine) while the heart is being repaired. Because the heart is stopped, Dr. Skipper and other surgeons have the flexibility to perform a wide range of heart operations, are able to operate with a high degree of precision and accuracy, and can easily manipulate the heart to perform even complex repairs.

In Port-Access surgery, CPB is established, and the heart stopped and protected, using specially designed catheters and devices threaded to the heart through blood vessels in the thigh and neck. Surgeons then operate on the heart itself through one or more small incisions between the ribs, using instruments specially designed for that type of repair.

"Operating on a heart that has been stopped and protected provides the best environment for performing cardiac surgery," Dr. Skipper said. "Port-Access surgery retains this advantage and enable surgeons to perform many types of cardiac repair, bringing the benefits of a minimally invasive approach to a large number of heart patients.

Some patients may not be candidates for Port-Access surgery, including those with significant narrowing of the blood vessels through which Port-Access devices must travel to reach the heart.

Through compassionate patient care, innovative medical procedures and a strong sense of community, the Sanger Clinic has built a reputation of trust and stability in the Carolinas. Founded in 1946 by Paul W. Sanger MD, the Sanger Clinic has grown to include an impressive staff of adult and pediatric cardiologists, and cardiac, thoracic and vascular surgeons. With 11 locations in both North and South Carolina, the Sanger Clinic offers convenient access to heart care. For more information, visit our website at www.sangerclinic.com