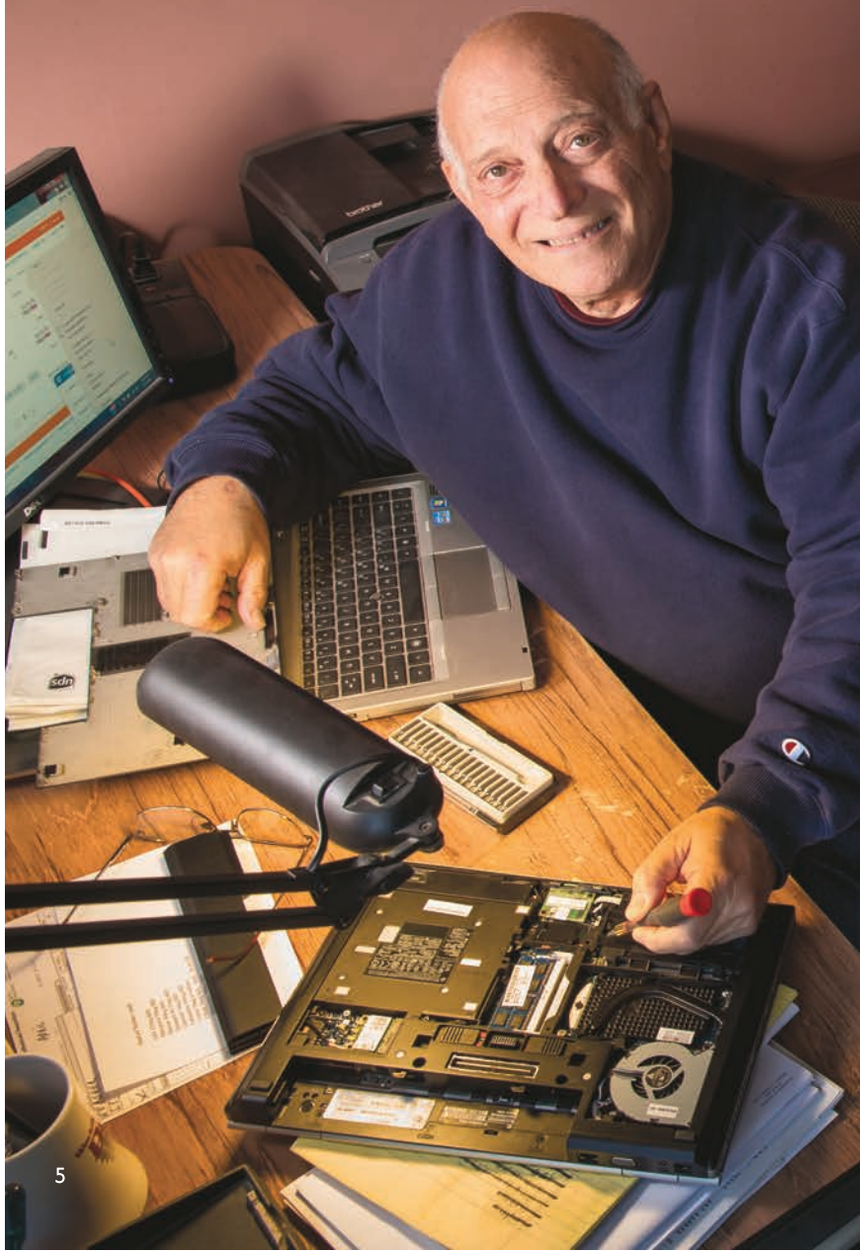
CARDIAC CATHETERIZATION

Healing Hearts Through the Wrist



Stan Werther had been short of breath for months and it was getting worse. "I had reached a point where I was unable to walk more than 5 or 6 paces without becoming exhausted," said the 70-year-old retired pharmacist from Edison, N.J. Mr. Werther went to see his primary care doctor, Chris Kolasa, MD, who referred him to Ramzan M. Zakir, MD, FACC, Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and Director of Transradial Catheterization at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital.

A nuclear stress test, which uses a small amount of a radioactive substance to show how the patient's heart is working at rest and during stress, showed the reason for Mr. Werther's shortness of breath: his right coronary (heart) artery was totally blocked. Mr. Werther had never had heart problems before, but he did have diabetes, kidney disease, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. He also smoked.

To open the blocked artery, Dr. Zakir used a newer type of cardiac catheterization procedure. Usually, doctors make a small incision in an artery in the thigh near the groin and thread the catheter (a thin plastic tube) up to the heart. Instead, Dr. Zakir inserted the catheter through the radial artery in the wrist, called transradial catheterization. He opened Mr. Werther's artery by inflating a tiny balloon attached to the catheter and then put in three stents, small wire mesh tubes, to help keep the artery open and decrease the chance of it narrowing or closing in the future. "We got a beautiful result and his symptoms resolved," said Dr. Zakir, who has done more than 1,000 transradial catheterizations.

While transradial catheterization can be more challenging to do than the usual procedure, Dr. Zakir prefers it because it is less invasive and more comfortable for patients. The risk of serious bleeding and access site complications is much lower with radial access and patients recover quicker. Mr. Werther was up and walking around shortly after the procedure. If the catheterization had been done through his thigh, he would have had to lay flat and still for hours and would have had more pain and bruising. Most patients can leave the hospital the same day, instead of staying overnight as with the usual procedure. Mr. Werther stayed in the hospital for two days so Dr. Zakir could make sure that his kidneys were working well.

"Transradial catheterization is a good option for most patients, even those with complex blockages like Mr. Werther," said Dr. Zakir. "It is not suitable for all patients, such as those who do not have good circulation to the hand."

Mr. Werther has felt "100 percent better" since he had the procedure. He is back to enjoying life with his wife of nearly 47 years, Jacqueline, and his two children and eight grandchildren, all of whom live within a few miles of his home.

Visit www.rwjuh.edu/heart or
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Shown: Stan Werther received treatment for his heart condition through just a small incision in his wrist and is now able to continue his hobby of repairing computers.