Sunnybrook
SCHULICH HEART CENTRE

New robotic lab makes heart procedures safer

Ontarians gain greater access to the most technologically advanced treatment for cardiac arrhythmias

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

TORONTO, ON (July 12, 2010) – Sunnybrook's Schulich Heart Centre today announced the opening of Toronto's first robotic arrhythmia invasive lab where patients with irregular heart beats can receive minimally invasive treatment to restore normal heart function.

"Our new lab is home to a cutting-edge system from Stereotaxis that uses computerized, magnet-guided technology to enhance the precision and safety of heart procedures," says Dr. Eugene Crystal, cardiologist and Director of Arrhythmia Services at the Schulich Heart Centre. "It is one of only three such suites in Canada and it will revolutionize how we treat our patients with cardiac arrhythmias and perform other cardiovascular interventions."

Cardiac arrhythmias occur when the electricity that flows through the heart to trigger the pumping action "short circuits" or gets blocked – disturbing the heart's normal rhythm. In many patients, this can cause symptoms like heart palpitations, fatigue, dizziness, chest pain and shortness of breath, which can severely affect quality of life. If left untreated, it can also lead to heart attack and stroke. The goal of treatment is to ablate - or destroy - damaged heart tissue that causes the electrical malfunction and restore a regular heart rhythm.

During a procedure in the robotic arrhythmia invasive suite, powerful magnets are positioned near the patient while a cardiologist operates the system from an adjoining control room, outside of the x-ray field. The sophisticated GPS technology maps a pathway through a patient's blood vessels and heart to the diseased heart tissue, and the magnets lead a soft catheter gently along this pathway by guiding its magnetic tip.

"The advanced navigational capabilities enable us to pinpoint the precise location of the faulty electrical site in order to position the catheter there and effectively deliver the required treatment to restore a normal heart rhythm, " says Dr. Crystal, who is also an associate professor of medicine at the University of Toronto. "With this enhanced level of precision, we can expect to have a much higher rate of success on our first attempt at fixing the problem, meaning we won't have to bring patients back for a second attempt or refer them on to a more invasive procedure which would require a longer stay in the hospital and longer recovery time."

Additional benefits:

- Reduces exposure to x-ray radiation for patients and medical staff.
- Reduces contrast dyes injected into patient's blood vessels during procedures.
- Reduces risk of major complications from perforation of blood vessels or heart tissue.

The new suite is part of a $25 million redevelopment project to create a world-class, technologically advanced Schulich Heart Centre.

“At the Schulich Heart Centre, we care for some of the province’s most critically ill heart patients,” says Dr. Brian Gilbert, chief of the Schulich Heart Centre. “Thanks to the incredible support of Mr. Seymour Schulich and the many other generous donors who contributed to this project, we have been able to build the first-class facility our teams need to continue providing exceptional care and inventing the future of health care.”

About Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre:

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre is inventing the future of health care for the one million patients the hospital cares for each year through the dedication of its more than 10,000 staff and volunteers. An internationally recognized leader in research and education and a full affiliation with the University of Toronto distinguishes Sunnybrook as one of Canada’s premier academic health sciences centres. Sunnybrook specializes in caring for Canada’s war veterans, high-risk pregnancies, critically-ill newborns, adults and the elderly, and treating and preventing cancer, cardiovascular disease, neurological disorders, orthopaedic and arthritic conditions and traumatic injuries.

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