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Mich. Man Is First To Get DuraHeart

By Patricia Anstett Detroit Free Press

DETROIT — A Livonia, Mich., heart failure patient is the first in the nation to receive the latest generation heart-assist device to help his heart pump better.

DuraHeart, made by Terumo Heart Inc. of Ann Arbor, Mich., hopes to provide more options for about 5 million Americans with congestive heart failure, a condition in which the heart loses much of its pumping ability after a heart attack or years of uncontrolled high blood pressure or diabetes.

Dr. Francis Pagani, director of the University of Michigan's Center for Circulatory Support, co-directs a clinical study to test the device in 140 patients at that center and 39 other U.S. hospitals.

The University of Michigan also is a national training site for doctors learning how to use the new device. It was approved last year for use in Europe.

"My doctor told me this is the best way to go," said Anthony Shannon, 62, a former director of homeland security for Wayne County, Mich. "He told me I had the Lamborghini of these things," Shannon said from his University of Michigan hospital room Tuesday.

A team of doctors implanted the DuraHeart left-ventricular assist system into Shannon's chest July 30.

The device will at least buy time for Shannon while he awaits a heart transplant. And by taking the load off his heart, "if I do get called for a transplant, it will be easier," Shannon said.

Pagani said he hopes the device can restore enough heart function that patients won't need a transplant.

"It is designed to be very durable" and could last as long as 10 years, compared with about eight years for earlier-generation devices, he said.

Most years, about 4,000 Americans wait for a donor heart but only about 2,100 a year get them because of shortages, according to the university. In Michigan, 69 people awaited a donor heart as of Friday, according to statistics from the Michigan Gift of Life organization donation registry.

The DuraHeart is a battery-powered device the size of a hockey puck implanted in the stomach. It uses magnetic technology to move a paddle wheel inside the device that helps the heart pump blood to the body without touching the sides of the heart chamber.

By avoiding wear and tear on the walls of the heart, doctors hope to avoid blood clots, strokes and infections that occurred with earlier-generation devices. Pagani said about 8 percent of patients who received so-called second-generation heart-assist devices developed strokes.

Treatment may be covered by Medicare, Medicaid and other insurance plans, Pagani said.

Terumo Heart Inc. is a subsidiary of Terumo Corp. of Tokyo.

It was formed in 2003 to develop the DuraHeart device. Terumo Corp. is a global manufacturer of a large range of medical products.

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