



St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center

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**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **St. Joseph's Launches Valley's Only Pediatric Heart Transplant Program**

St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center is launching the Valley's only pediatric heart transplant program and the first heart transplant could take place in a child as early as spring.

"St. Joseph's transplant program is unique to the state because we are focused on pediatric heart failure and transplantation," says John Nigro, MD, heart transplant program director at St. Joseph's. "Our goal is to work with our community and regional hospitals and physicians to provide a local option for pediatric heart transplantation. We've established all the necessary elements and are ready to proceed with the program."

In mid-November, St. Joseph's received approval from the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), the non-profit organization that coordinates transplant activity in the United States. St. Joseph's expects to perform approximately five heart transplants per year, making it a medium-sized program when compared to the United State's other major pediatric heart transplant centers.

Dr. Nigro and St. Joseph's heart-transplant team — medical director Stephen Pophal, MD, and transplant cardiologists Edward Rhee, MD, Robert Puntel, MD, and Susan Parks, RNP — gained expertise and extensive experience at national transplant centers in the United States and will use this knowledge to establish these capabilities in Arizona.

"This is a Valley of more than four million people, who until now, had no dedicated pediatric heart transplant program. Currently, most children travel out of Phoenix and even the state to receive their transplant," says Dr. Pophal. "Patients must receive lifelong care after their transplant, which includes daily medications to prevent organ rejection and regular check-ups with specialists. They will now be able to do all of this locally."

Pediatric heart transplants are among the most complicated procedures and patients require a lifetime of care. A heart transplant is recommended for children who have serious heart dysfunction and cannot be managed with medications or other surgeries. Doctors at St. Joseph's say this can affect children from only a few days old into adulthood, and the program is prepared to support the needs of all of these patients.

"Our heart transplant program is among the several unique pediatric procedures and comprehensive cardio-thoracic care programs St. Joseph's offers to the local community and the state of Arizona," says Dr. Nigro. "The concept of our program is to be a regional resource and provide continual care within a hospital that distinguishes itself from all other cardiac programs in the state."

In Arizona, 10 to 20 children per year are candidates for heart transplantations. If transplantation is appropriate, children can wait weeks, others can wait years for a suitable donor organ to become available. Currently, the University Medical Center Tucson and Mayo Clinic Arizona also have adult heart transplant programs with some pediatric components.

This will be the second transplantation program launched at St. Joseph's. In April 2007, the hospital completed the Valley's first lung transplant. Since then, the Heart & Lung Institute at St. Joseph's has completed 38 lung transplants.

— St. Joseph's —