

The Master Heart Surgeon

I am writing on behalf of my father who underwent surgery with Dr. Jeffrey Lee on April 21, 2014. Dr. Lee was originally referred by Dr. Margaret Rasouli, who is my father's cardiologist.

My father had turned 90 on January 10 and was suffering from congestive heart failure when he first saw Dr. Lee. Dr. Lee thoroughly explained exactly what needed to be done – replace one valve and repair two others – and was confident from the get go that the procedure would be successful despite my father's age. He rated my dad's risk at about 10%, and we prepared to go forward with the surgery.

However, at the eleventh hour my dad decided not to go through with the surgery as there was little or no data on survival/mortality rates for a man his age, including multiple valve work that was proposed as opposed to just replacing the aortic valve alone, for example. (Right from the beginning Dr. Lee had insisted that all three valves needed to be dealt with and held firm to this belief.) But the potential aftermath and quality of life issues, my dad and family reasoned, might not be worth the risk – a possible tracheotomy, possible dialysis several times per week, on his back for several months in recovery...

We were going to let nature take its course, although none of us really knew what that meant at the time. That decision changed within about 90 days as the stenosis and my father's accompanying edema worsened and his health rapidly deteriorated.

Back to Dr. Lee who was very concerned that the risk factor had now doubled, in his opinion, and that the surgery was clearly do or die. Dr. Lee was forthright with us the whole time, did not sugarcoat the situation or minimize the risks. At the same time, my father was not in good enough shape any more for Dr. Lee to feel comfortable enough about doing surgery. My father was put in the hospital so Dr. Rasouli and Dr. Lee could get the fluid down, which they did... roughly 20 pounds worth.

My dad says he was very confident in Dr. Lee the whole time and knew he would pull through the surgery. Dr. Lee managed to complete the unprecedented procedure in 2.5 hours less than he originally estimated, and there were no complications whatsoever. (In fact the nursing and rehab staffs at Saddleback and St. Joseph's where my dad did his rehab spoke very highly of Dr. Lee who they said had a reputation for meticulousness and attention to detail.)

Dr. Lee visited daily while my dad was at Saddleback, and we were all delighted to see him and congratulate him on one of his major success stories. I call him The Master Heart Surgeon.

The long and short of it is, Dr. Lee saved my father's life, gave him a second chance at life, and proved that age alone, being as old as 90, was not sufficient reason to discount surgery on a person who needed it. Dr. Lee's confidence in his own skills, the certainty of his diagnosis, the positive and professional manner in which he conducted himself and kept us all in the loop – all these things put us at ease, and we could not be happier with Dr. Lee!

Dr. Lee turned out to be very right: My father absolutely needed all three valves done (replaced or repaired); and a person of 90 in decent shape otherwise could survive heart surgery and rehab/recover in a reasonable amount of time (it has been about 85 days from the date of surgery). Dr. Lee broke down the age barrier and in so doing now has documented evidence that could save countless other lives of elderly patients who otherwise might just be dismissed as too old to bother with, too old to survive the procedure.

Dr. Lee is a great surgeon and a great human being. He worked a miracle on my father and we will always be grateful. We also would be willing to speak with any person contemplating surgery with Dr. Lee to testify to his character, his technical skills as we are able to appreciate them, his caring and truthful communication, and our overall extraordinary experience. Thank you again, Dr. Lee, from the bottom of our hearts and souls.

Respectfully yours,

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