

Providence Health

Revolutionary HEART Treatments Mean Hope for Tomorrow

by Marilyn Thomas

The heart has an indispensable role in sustaining human life. Maintaining its health is a significant driver for innovative medical advancements. Newer procedures to repair the heart's structure have become less invasive, and here in the Midlands, Providence Health is already delivering this groundbreaking, life-changing cardiovascular technology.

Historically, Providence Health has been recognized for providing cutting-edge health care services within the local community. In addition to numerous accolades and certifications, U.S. News and World Report lists Providence as one of the state's best hospitals for its high level of quality care and successful outcomes. From within its comprehensive array of medical facilities, located throughout the greater Columbia area, one of its emerging specialties is the Structural Heart Program.

According to the American College of Cardiology, structural heart disease refers to "valvular heart disease and anatomic cardiac defects" which can either be present at birth or develop due to aging, injury, or infection. When these issues arise, intervention may be necessary to maintain quality of life. In the not-too-distant past, open-heart surgery was the only recourse to repair the problem, but today, newer, less invasive, catheter-based treatments may be a better option for those who are unable to undergo a more risky surgical procedure.

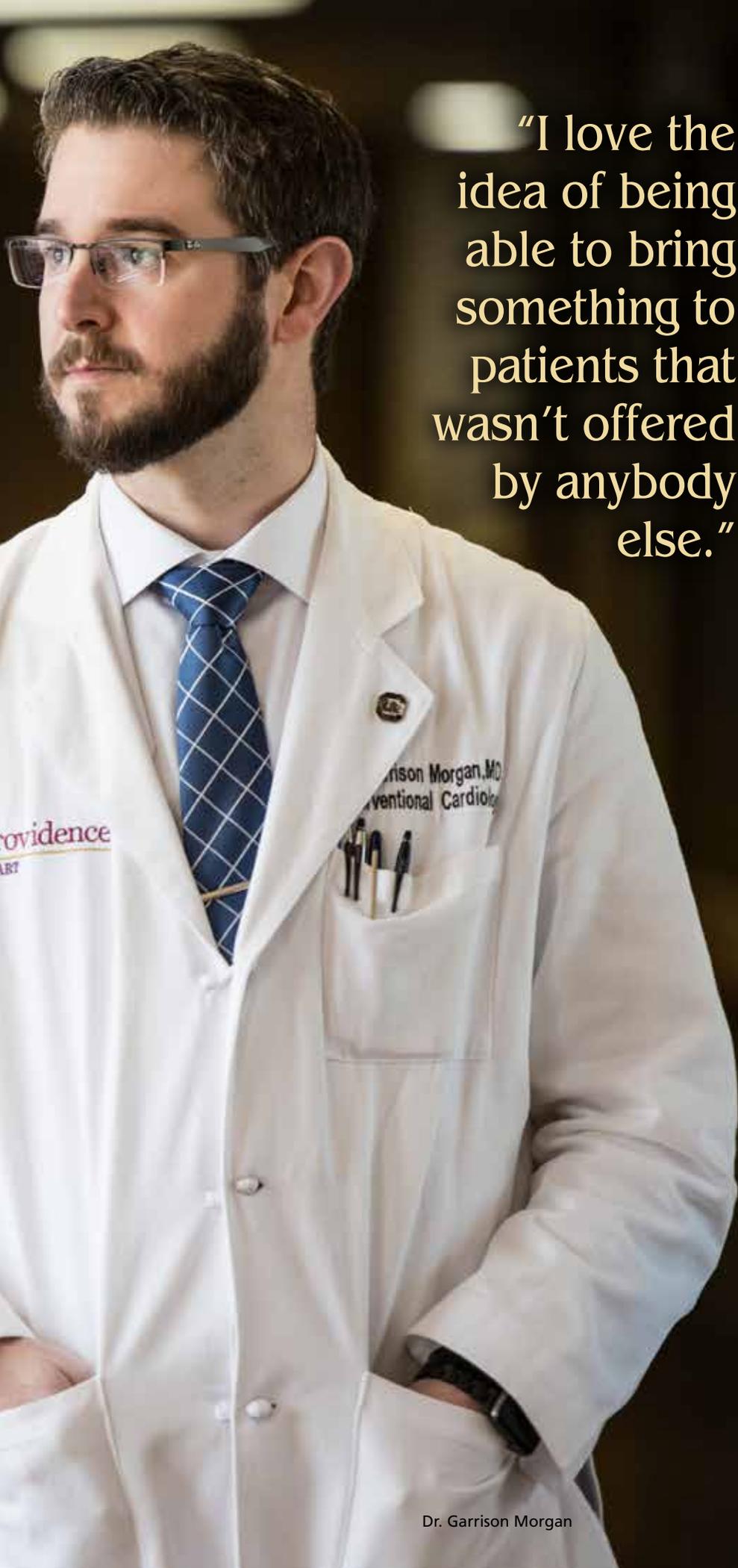
Leading the way for many of these advanced techniques at the Providence Structural Heart Clinic is Lexington resident Dr. Garrison Morgan, a cardiologist who is board certified in internal medicine, cardiovascular disease, and interventional car-

diology and who received special training in the treatment of structural heart disease. "When it comes to structural heart, Providence has really pioneered," he says. "We're actually the only comprehensive structural heart program in the state."

"No matter what problem you may have," he explains, "a leaky mitral valve, a tight aortic valve, an appendage occlusion, or a hole in the heart, we do all of those, and more."

He specifically mentions several procedures that were first offered at Providence, including the Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR) and the insertion of the WATCHMAN device, which helps to prevent strokes in patients with atrial fibrillation and can eliminate the need to take blood thinners.

"The one thing the Midlands didn't have that was an area of expertise of mine," he says, "was the MitraClip. As it stands now, we're on track to be one of the top implanters in the country this year for the MitraClip. This is a minimally invasive catheter-based way to repair a leaky mitral valve using a small hole in the vessel of a patient's leg as an alternative to surgery. "I love the idea of being able to bring treatments that are new and innovative to patients," says Dr. Morgan. "It's one of the reasons why I went into structural cardiology, one of the fastest growing



“I love the idea of being able to bring something to patients that wasn’t offered by anybody else.”

divisions of cardiology at the moment.”

Ever since childhood, Dr. Morgan knew he wanted to become a physician. He was attracted to the field of cardiology because new research, medicines, and technologies are continuously being developed to combat the country’s leading cause of death. “It’s very rewarding to be able to use the knowledge and skills acquired over years of training to do things which make other people happy,” he says, “and to bring them more time with their family and to better health.”

A home-grown South Carolinian, he attended Wofford College on a full scholarship and later enrolled in the University of South Carolina’s School of Medicine. Today, he and his wife and their two children reside in Lexington because, “It seemed like a great place to raise a family and it was a good location in the middle of everything, yet still out of the way.”

On a personal level, Dr. Morgan is no stranger to the challenges of structural heart issues. When his residency was nearly completed, his oldest child was unexpectedly born with a heart defect that required three open-heart surgeries. Before the birth, Dr. Morgan had applied for a cardiology fellowship and was notified of his acceptance just a few days before his son arrived. “It was a very difficult time,” he says. “Everyone looks to you as the ‘future cardiologist’ to make the right decisions for your child’s future. We were blessed that he was able to have a complete repair of his heart and is now a happy, energetic, and rambunctious five year old.” Because these events unfolded during the Christmas season and because they understand the emotional, physical, and financial strains of “living in the waiting room,” he and his family reach out each year to others whose children are hospitalized during the holidays, by donating blankets, clothing, toys, and meals to “try to provide a little bit of hope.”

Similarly, these new, less invasive procedures Dr. Morgan performs are also extending some hope to “patients, who for years, have been told they didn’t have any options,” he says. “Now, we’re giving them a whole new shot at life.”

Dr. Morgan is not alone in this department, and he attributes the success of the program to the team efforts of all the professionals involved at Providence. He praises the “excellent” cardiac anesthesia team and their “expert” echocardiography

Dr. Garrison Morgan

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skills, and also mentions the collaborative work with cardiothoracic surgery specialists at Providence's nationally-recognized Heart & Vascular Institute.

Dr. Conrad Bauknight is another cardiologist heavily involved in the Structural Heart Program at Providence. Certified in internal medicine, cardiology, electrophysiology and as a cardiac device specialist, Dr. Bauknight has been seeing patients at Providence's Lexington location since 2010. While he and Dr. Morgan both offer appointments at this location, Dr. Bauknight specializes in a minimally-invasive left atrial appendage closure procedure which prevents stroke-causing blood clots from forming and eliminates the need for blood thinners.

"You don't function as an individual when you're put on a structural heart team," he says. "Everything's being done together, being decided on in a group setting."

As a physician with Providence for 24 years, he adds, "It's the collaborative framework that's different than what we've historically done. This way, we move with a lot more thought. It works out quite well, actually."

One of the program's patients, James Long, is a retired heating and air octogenarian from the Batesburg-Leesville area. Twelve years ago, his heart valve began to fail, which necessitated open-heart surgery at Providence to replace it with a bovine valve. He recalls that he was hospitalized for about a week and that, "getting over it was a long time, too."

In late March of 2018, he visited his



Dr. Bill Phillips and Dr. Garrison Morgan reviewing a case with Structural Heart Coordinator Lisa Sand

primary care doctor at Providence for an upper-respiratory infection. She immediately admitted him to the hospital when she detected an issue with his heart. Dr. Morgan performed the valve-in-valve TAVR procedure to repair the problem, and this time, Mr. Long went home the next day.

"I had only a one-inch incision and all I had was about three stitches," adds Mr. Long. "The nurses and everybody, Dr. Morgan, and the people there, all the way around, the other doctors and all [are] first class!"

According to Dr. Morgan, patients like Mr. Long are strong candidates for struc-

tural heart procedures, and "we're now seeing a resurgence in these patients."

"People who have a heart problem, whether it be a bad valve or a hole in the heart or something that needed to be fixed but they've been turned down for traditional therapies and surgeries," he explains. "We're able to offer repairs and with results that are as good or better than surgical outcomes."

"We are a very patient-oriented practice," Dr. Morgan concludes. "Once you come to our office, we will do whatever it takes to ensure you get the treatment that's best for you, no matter what the issue may be."

A more detailed explanation of the Structural Heart Program at Providence Health, as well as information about the medical specialties offered there can be found at www.yourprovidence-health.com/StructuralHeart or by calling (803) 673-0925.

The Lexington office of Providence Heart is located at 108 Palmetto Park Boulevard. You can make an appointment by calling (803) 356-0949. ■

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Dr. Conrad Bauknight has been seeing patients at this Lexington office since 2010