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## **Covenant Health System first in West Texas region to offer new alternative to open heart surgery**

### **New hope for older, high-risk patients**

Lubbock, Texas – West Texas patients who are not candidates for open heart surgery now have a treatment option for their aortic stenosis through a non-surgical procedure call the TAVR—or transcatheter aortic valve replacement—at Covent Health System. Doctors in Covenant's state-of-the-art hybrid cardiac surgical suite successfully performed this revolutionary new procedure in January and February of this year, healing patients with aortic stenosis, a progressive heart disease which causes calcium deposits to build up inside the aortic valve. Because the narrowed valve restricts blood flow, patients with this disease experience weakness and shortness of breath, as their hearts must work harder to pump blood.

In contrast to traditional open heart surgery, which requires opening a patient's chest and stopping the heart, doctors use TAVR to replace an aortic heart valve through only a small incision in the patient's groin. A long, flexible tube called a catheter is threaded through the incision into an artery and up to the heart, where a collapsible aortic valve is placed within the existing diseased valve, without stopping the patient's heart. Patients experience immediate benefits after TAVR, including freer breathing and increased energy.

Discharge time is usually two to three days after the procedure, as compared to a week-long hospital stay and six-week recovery time required by open heart surgery. The complexity of TAVR, ideal for high-risk patients, requires a multidisciplinary team prepared for any contingency. Covenant Health System is the first medical facility in the region to develop the necessary specialized surgery suite, called a “hybrid O.R.,” comprising interventional cardiologists, heart surgeons and specialists. If at any point during the procedure it becomes necessary for physicians to perform traditional open heart surgery, the hybrid O.R. stands ready to perform life-saving surgical services without delay.

Covenant's hybrid O.R. is the first and only in the West Texas-Eastern New Mexico area, and, along with its programs and specialists, establishes Covenant as the most advanced and comprehensive cardiac provider in the region. Interventional cardiologist Dr. Marc

Levine explains that TAVR is uniquely suited to help elderly patients because it uses the hardened, older aortic valve to hold a new replacement valve in place. With TAVR, “we’re replacing an entire valve in the heart without open heart surgery,” Levine said. “The reason this procedure works is because the old valve that has become ‘calcified’—similar to being full of rocks—will hold the new valve in place.”

TAVR is also ideal for the elderly due to the quick recovery time and the immediate relief it provides from the symptoms of aortic stenosis, which puts great pressure on a patient’s heart, causing shortness of breath, tightening of the chest, low energy, fainting and eventually, heart failure. With aortic stenosis, blood flow to vital organs like the kidneys becomes inadequate, and fluid backs up into the lungs, causing a drowning feeling for the patient. Covenant heart surgeon Dr. William Springer said: “That’s the whole ball game: Patients who would otherwise be sent home to die can now have this procedure and get a new lease on life.”

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