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## New procedure cuts risk in lowan's heart surgery

**The TandemHeart system's use at University Hospitals in Iowa City is believed to be the first in the state.**

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Iowa City, Ia. — The scar tissue that had formed on 71-year-old Irvin White's arteries created too much of a risk for the Mount Pleasant man to undergo a traditional bypass operation.

Doctors told White that he risked death if he continued living with the partially blocked arteries or if he underwent angioplasty, White said.

So White opted to travel to the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, where doctors conducted an innovative procedure using a device called the TandemHeart percutaneous ventricular assist system. The procedure, which White underwent last week, is believed to be the first time it was used in Iowa.

"I was kind of nervous and anxious and all that. There was no guarantee, but I had to put my mind up to have it done," he said. "It was painful. It was hurting when they were doing it, but I went out after a while."

Added White: "It had to be done. . . . I wasn't planning on being a guinea pig. I just knew I had to have it done."

Patients like White who have had a massive heart attack or a weakened heart are at high risk of serious complication during coronary interventions or heart surgery, medical experts say.

White said he was anxious about undergoing major surgery again, but looked to his doctors for comfort. "I'm not religious," he said. "I just trusted my doctors. That's the only thing I could do."

A stent was placed in one of White's arteries while the TandemHeart kept blood flowing normally throughout his body.

Dr. Phillip Horwitz, who conducted White's surgery, said traditional procedures normally involve a "very high risk" because they have the potential of disrupting blood flow to the heart, causing swings in blood pressure and affecting heart rhythm.

The TandemHeart system, developed by CardiacAssist Inc. in Pittsburgh, is threaded into position through blood vessels to temporarily support a weakened heart. Once doctors put the TandemHeart in place, it quickly takes over about 85 percent of the heart's pumping function, helping deliver oxygenated blood to the body's vital organs to prevent further tissue damage.

The device was in White for about four hours, officials said.

Horwitz, an interventional cardiologist at University Hospitals, said the TandemHeart provided essential leeway for surgeons to operate on White.

"It enabled us to work on the artery without the blood pressure and other problems that usually occur with this procedure," Horwitz said.

Doctors have used the cutting-edge procedure in select hospitals since January 2004.

White, who is retired from the Morrell Meatpacking Co. in Ottumwa, said the weeklong stay at the hospital racked his nerves.

Slouching in a chair in his hospital room, wearing a diamond pattern gown, gray socks and holding an IV sticking in his arm, White listened to a nurse explain how he should handle the aftermath of the surgery. After a nurse read him his discharge instructions Friday morning, one of his doctors popped into his room to wish White well.

"Mr. White, you're a tough guy to get rid of, but we're finally going to do it," said Dr. Jayson Neagle, a resident physician in



**HARRY BAUMERT/THE REGISTER**

It worked: Irvin White is grateful for a healthier heartbeat since he underwent a cutting-edge procedure at University Hospitals in Iowa City. He is shown in his hospital room Friday, shortly before he was discharged. The two horizontal lines on the monitor indicate his heartbeat.

### On the Web

For more information about the TandemHeart percutaneous ventricular assist system, go to [www.cardiacassist.com](http://www.cardiacassist.com).

Internal medicine, with a laugh. "We like you, but we'd just as soon not see you again."

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