Iowa Heart Center Electrophysiologist Robert Hoyt, M.D., was the first in Iowa to perform a commercial implant of the Watchman Left Atrial Appendage Closure (LAAC) device, providing patients with non-valvular atrial fibrillation (AF), an alternative to long-term “blood-thinning” warfarin medication. The procedure was performed at Mercy on two patients with AF on Nov. 9.

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a heart condition where the upper chambers of the heart beat too fast and with irregular rhythm. AF is the most common cardiac arrhythmia and poses an increased risk of stroke. The most common treatment to reduce stroke risk is “blood-thinning” warfarin medication. Despite its proven efficacy, long-term warfarin medication is not tolerated by many patients and carries a significant risk for bleeding complications.

Recently approved by the FDA, the Watchman device – about the size of a quarter and shaped like a parachute – is designed to close the left atrial appendage (LAA) in order to keep harmful blood clots from entering the blood stream and potentially causing a stroke for higher risk patients with non-valvular AF. By closing off the LAA, the risk of stroke may be reduced and, over time, patients may be able to stop taking warfarin.

“Implanting the Watchman device is a one-time procedure under general anesthesia that generally takes about an hour. The device is implanted into the heart through a large blood vessel in the leg during a minimally invasive procedure with a team using X-ray and ultrasound technology. After the procedure, patients typically stay in the hospital for 24 hours, and return to their normal lifestyles within a few weeks,” said Dr. Hoyt.

Dr. Hoyt has been implanting the WATCHMAN device since 2011 in clinical trials testing the device.

“We have extensive experience and expertise in treating atrial fibrillation along the complete spectrum. Providing our patients with yet another option to help manage their A-fib now further enhances our integrated and comprehensive approach to A-fib therapy at Mercy and Iowa Heart Center,” said Dr. Hoyt. “The Watchman device is a potentially life-changing stroke risk treatment that could free certain patients from taking blood-thinning medication.”
“Mercy Spirit Day” today!

Bring the jolly to Mercy today and celebrate Christmas while helping give back to our friends at Make-A-Wish Iowa!

It is a day of celebration and giving as Mercy Children’s Hospital staff are wearing blinking lapel pins and Mercy staff members wear Mercy logo apparel in honor of Spirit Day.

Make a donation to Make-A-Wish Iowa between now and Thursday, Dec. 31, and you, too, will receive a blinking pin (while supplies last) to help your holiday spirit shine. Donations are being collected at all Mercy Auxiliary locations – gift shops, Starbucks, West Lakes Brew and the Salon.

Mercy will match every dollar donated by our staff for this campaign, with all proceeds going to support the children served by Make-A-Wish Iowa. Your support of this effort will help the organization continue to provide happy, magical moments for critically ill Iowa children.

Mercy welcomes women’s services director

Last month, Mercy announced the creation of a new women’s health center, made possible by a generous donation by the Comfort Family Foundation. The Comfort Health Center for Women is expected to open in early 2017, and spearheading the efforts of the new center is Leisha Barcus.

Leisha joined the Mercy Family as the new center’s director in September 2015. She has been working with the Mercy Foundation, women’s services providers and others to start the renovations at Mercy West, where the new center will be located, and begin planning the specialized health care services for women ages 40 and older.

For more than 25 years, Leisha has been initiating and managing special projects in the Des Moines area through several organizations, including: Iowa Department of Economic Development, Greater Des Moines Partnership, Hoyt Sherman Place Foundation, Kum & Go and the Science Center of Iowa.

“I am very excited about this new endeavor at Mercy,” said Leisha. “This is a niche in our market that isn’t being fulfilled for women who are in their prime, and now Mercy has an opportunity to provide that missing piece in their health care.”

Leisha is happy to share more about the Comfort Health Center for Women and hear from Mercy staff members. She can be contacted at lbarcus@mercydesmoines.org or (515) 643-8032.

Editorial changes for the upcoming holidays

Due to the upcoming holidays, the “Bulletin” newsletter next week will be published on Thursday, Dec. 24, instead of on Friday, which is Christmas Day.

The following week, “Mercy News Briefs” will be distributed on its usual Tuesday and Thursday schedule, but there will be no “Bulletin” newsletter published on Friday, Jan. 1.