

*Rick Gach, PhD, a doctor of physiotherapy, teaches patient Richard Soukeroff a new method of moving after his open heart surgery, called "Keep Your Move in the Tube." The new procedure gets patients back to their normal activities faster and will soon be implemented at the Foothills Medical Centre. Photo by Dawn Smith.*



# Keep **your** move **in the** tube

*By Dawn Smith*

**S**taff members at the Foothills Medical Centre (FMC) are blazing a path when it comes to post-cardiac-surgery care.

Clinical nurse educators Chris Coltman, Heather Agren and Susan Colwell, along with physiotherapist Lauren Park, are thrilled Section Chief of Cardiac Surgery Dr. Imtiaz Ali jumped on their suggestion

to implement new sternal precautions following heart surgery. The suggestion was based on research by the Alberta Health Services staff members, who work in the cardiac clinics at the FMC.

According to Coltman, patients are now told not to push, pull or lift more than 10 pounds, raise their hands above their head

or use their arms to get out of bed for up to eight weeks following surgery to allow the sternum to heal.

"Currently, it is very restrictive—it's don't, don't, don't" said Coltman, noting there really wasn't any scientific evidence supporting the restrictive procedures for patients after heart surgery.

Nor was there a standard of care, noted Park, saying there are nearly as many procedures as there are post-surgery care centres.

The group's research led to an approach developed by Jenny Adams, PhD, of the Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas.

She developed "Keep Your Move in the Tube" as an alternative way to help prevent sternal wound complications that involves keeping elbows tucked into the sides while lifting, pushing, pulling or raising the arms above the head.

The method allows patients to return to their normal activities much quicker, which may alleviate anxiety and even lower health-care costs.

The FMC group presented their research to Ali, who gave them the green light to move ahead with the project. Nurse educators already met with a group from Florida who have implemented the procedure, and training of nursing staff will begin shortly.

Especially exciting for the group is the response they have received from other



Medical staff at the Foothills Medical Centre (FMC) pose alongside Jenny Adams, PhD (front left) and Dr. Rick Gach, a doctor of physiotherapy, (front, second from left) during a training session to learn a science-based method of getting patients up and moving after open heart surgery called "Keep Your Move in the Tube." The procedure will soon be implemented at the FMC.

medical centres in Alberta, such as Red Deer, Lethbridge and Edmonton, interested in the procedure.

"We are starting a new movement," said Park.

**"We are starting a new movement."**

**Lauren Park**

# Providing unique care

## *Clinic treats genetic condition that causes heart to thicken*

Calgary's only Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy Clinic is reinventing itself following a recent move from the Peter Lougheed Centre to South Health Campus. The clinic treats hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM), a relatively common condition that affects the left ventricle of the heart. It is caused by a faulty gene that affects 0.5 per cent of the population and results in the cells stacking rather than lying flat, which causes thickening of the heart.

This thickening can affect the way electricity moves around the heart, causing arrhythmias, altering mechanics and causing obstructions that may decrease efficiency or even block blood from pumping out of the heart.

According to Bethany Trotter, a nurse clinician at the clinic, those with the condition—who can be any age—often feel tired, short of breath and notice changes in the heartbeat. Other times, they have no symptoms. As the problem persists,

patients may experience changes in blood pressure, fainting, arrhythmias, strokes and even sudden cardiac death.

The outpatient clinic, which has a patient list of about 400 from all over Alberta and Southern B.C., has four cardiologists that manage patients. It partners with surgeons and can refer patients to device clinics for implantable cardiac defibrillators. Because of the genetic aspect, Trotter says it's critical that family members of patients with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy be tested and monitored for the condition. It is also important they receive education about the condition.

"We are able to test, look at family history and follow up with the patient," said Trotter.

The clinic is always accepting new referrals with documented or suspected HCM. They are also hoping to get more involved in research through collaborations with such groups as the Stephenson Cardiac Imaging Centre.