

# Heal Faster. Do More.

By Rebecka Zemlock, Public Relations Director at San Angelo Community Medical Center

Dr. James Taylor and his wife, Christine Taylor, the husband and wife cardiology duo at Community Medical Associates, are always focused on advance procedures which are less invasive for their patients.

That's what first attracted them to endoscopic vein harvesting.

Christine Taylor is a Registered Nurse and First Assistant during her husband's coronary bypass surgeries. She has special training to use endoscopic equipment and make a small incision near a patient's knee to remove the saphenous vein.

That vein is passed over to Dr. James Taylor, who uses segments of it to replace blocked arteries near the heart. Since the Taylors began work in San Angelo in February, they have averaged about two to three coronary bypass surgeries a week.

"Endoscopic vein harvesting demonstrates Community's continual commitment to advancing health care in West Texas," said Brad Holland, chief executive officer of San Angelo Community Medical Center. "Community continues to bring firsts to West Texas. We are committed to improving cardiac services and enabling our patients to recover faster."

The Taylors are the first medical professionals in San Angelo to use endoscopic vein harvesting, although about 70 percent of coronary bypass surgeries in the U.S. use this method, Christine Taylor said.

"It's just a lot less traumatic on the tissue," she said.

Christine Taylor said the benefits of endoscopic vein harvesting over the traditional method of vein harvesting are threefold: Because the incision is small, patients experience less pain during recovery, the wound heals quicker, and cosmetically, the scar is much smaller.

"The incision is about the size of a paper cut," Christine Taylor said.

The traditional method of vein harvesting involves making a cut the whole length of the leg or making a series of incisions two inches apart down the length of the leg. The wounds can be painful and difficult to heal, Christine Taylor said.

In fact, after coronary bypass surgery using traditional vein harvesting, patients are more likely to complain about pain in their leg than pain in the chest because the heart doesn't have nerves surrounding it, she said.

Traditional vein harvesting also presents more opportunities for infection during healing, Christine Taylor said.

Typically, if people have artery blockage around their heart, they probably have artery blockage in other parts of the body and may have a condition known as peripheral arterial disease, which causes reduced blood flow to the limbs. Christine Taylor said this condition can be problematic for patients who receive traditional vein harvesting because the leg needs good blood flow to heal properly.

In addition to specialized training, endoscopic vein harvesting requires special equipment. Among other tools, Christine Taylor uses a carbon dioxide inflator and a device that cuts and seals the vein, as well as camera equipment and a video screen so that she can see what she is doing beneath the surface of the skin.

Even though endoscopic vein harvesting is new to San Angelo, the technique has been used for about 15 years, Christine Taylor said. However, it wasn't until recent years that more sophisticated equipment made the method easier to perform for medical professionals.

Christine Taylor has performed endoscopic vein harvesting since 2004.

The time it takes to perform the endoscopic procedure varies from patient to patient, Christine Taylor said, but it does not take any longer than the traditional method. To remove the saphenous vein the entire length of the leg takes about 30 minutes on the average patient.

Although a few patients on the operating table are experiencing an emergency situation, Christine Taylor said most of their coronary bypass patients are classified as being in an "urgent situation." While most aren't experiencing a heart attack, their artery blockage is significant and is not going to go away on its own.

Patient feedback after endoscopic vein harvesting procedures has been positive, she said. They are able to heal faster and do more sooner.

"Patients love it, especially those with friends and family who had open heart surgery a few years ago, and they saw the pain and recovery process they went through," Christine Taylor said.