

80-year-olds prosper after heart surgery

Patients in their 80s and even in their 90s can successfully undergo major cardiac surgery, allowing them to enjoy years of enhanced quality of life, Drs. Kevin Lachapelle and Rakesh Chaturvedi told a Canadian Cardiovascular Congress audience in Toronto in November.

“This is an especially important finding because baby boomers will live longer and better than anyone expected,” says cardiac surgeon Lachapelle.

He was reporting on 185 patients aged 80 and up who underwent surgery at the McGill University Health Centre to replace or repair defective heart valves. More than five years after the surgery, 60 per cent are alive and, of that figure, over 90 per cent are leading active, healthy lives.

“This is a successful result,” says Lachapelle.

The conference was co-hosted by the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Canadian Cardiovascular Society.

Lachapelle says there are many octogenarians out there who are not referred for surgery because they are considered to be too old. “That’s a matter for surgeons to decide,” he says. The McGill study is even more significant because all patients received open chest surgery. New, less traumatic, procedures such as operating via the femoral artery are becoming available and may lead to even better results in the elderly. According to Lachapelle, the study will be a significant benchmark for measuring the long-term success of these new procedures.

“We are sometimes asked if we are wasting money operating on patients aged 80 and over and if we are putting elderly patients through unnecessary trauma,” says Chaturvedi, a co-author. “Keeping these patients active and healthy saves costs to the health-care system. A very significant number of our patients are thriving.”