



Heart to Heart Global Cardiac Care

Measurably Expanding Access Since 1989

SITE: SAN JUAN DE DIOS HOSPITAL
LOCATION: SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA
COLLABORATION LAUNCHED: 2023

SEPTEMBER 16–24, 2023
CARDIAC TRAINING MISSION 1
PATIENT STORY



HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY

Sixty-one-year-old Ilse, affectionately called “doña Ilse,” or “Mrs. Ilse” in Spanish, has worked as a cook in the large central market in her hometown of San Ramon, Costa Rica for her whole adult life. One day, in the middle of the night, she suddenly felt that she was drowning. She could barely muster the strength to say, “To the hospital, to the hospital!” Doña Ilse didn’t know it, but she was having a pulmonary edema episode—a symptom of heart failure. When she and her family arrived at the hospital, local doctors found that her lungs were full of fluid, and they knew something was wrong with her heart.

MEDICAL HISTORY

By the time doña Ilse was diagnosed with severe mitral valve insufficiency, she had already been experiencing significant shortness of breath for approximately three months. After reviewing her case, our Heart to Heart-San Juan de Dios team determined that she would be an ideal candidate for a minimally invasive valve repair.

Mitral valve insufficiency refers to a defect of the mitral valve leaflets, which causes the valve to leak severely. In some cases, like in doña Ilse’s, the mitral valve does not open and shut properly, causing some of the blood to flow in the wrong direction, back into the heart instead of out to the lungs. This can cause symptoms of weakness, shortness of breath, leg swelling, dizziness, and fainting—all symptoms of heart failure. If the mitral valve is not surgically repaired or replaced, the valve insufficiency may eventually lead to death.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP CARE

On September 19, 2023, one week before her birthday, doña Ilse became Heart to Heart’s first patient at San Juan de Dios Hospital. Our joint Heart to Heart-San Juan de Dios team successfully performed her minimally invasive mitral valve repair. Doña Ilse was discharged from the ICU just two days later, and was back home with her family in time to celebrate her 62nd birthday!

For patients like doña Ilse, access to timely treatment can increase life expectancy by 15 years, or more, and spares them from the terrible symptoms of end-stage heart failure. As more people live longer, timely access to cardiac care is more and more critical. These life-saving treatments markedly improve and extend lives, which in turn gives our patients precious time to cherish with their children, grandchildren, and loved ones.

Based on an interview conducted in Spanish by Lucie Everett, Heart to Heart staff.

PATIENT PROFILE

Name	Ilse A.
Age	61 years old
DOB	September 25, 1961
Home	San Ramon, Costa Rica
Diagnosis	Mitral valve insufficiency
Open heart surgery	Mitral valve repair via right minithoracotomy
Date of procedure	September 19, 2023
Discharged from ICU	September 21, 2023