



# Heart to Heart Global Cardiac Care

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

*Measurably Expanding Access Since 1989*

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



## HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY

Seventy-five-year-old Mercedes lives in San Juan Grande with her four children, one grandchild, and two great-grandchildren. Mercedes was diagnosed with severe mitral valve insufficiency after she noticed herself becoming tired while doing housework. A humble stay-at-home mother who had never worked outside the home, Mercedes knew that this was unusual, but when doctors told her she would need open heart surgery, she was too frightened, and told them she could not undergo an operation on her heart.

## MEDICAL HISTORY

Mercedes's mitral valve does not open and shut properly, enabling blood to flow in the wrong direction, back into her heart. When she was born, the leaflets on Mercedes's mitral valve were abnormally thick, making them susceptible to tearing. Mercedes did not notice any health issues until the leaflets tore, after which she experienced a quick onset of symptoms, notably shortness of breath and fatigue. The torn leaflets meant that her mitral valve could no longer function correctly, and Mercedes's overall heart function was negatively impacted.

## TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP CARE

After reviewing Mercedes's case, our Heart to Heart-San Juan de Dios team determined that she would be an ideal candidate for a minimally invasive valve repair. A minithoracotomy would be a less daunting surgery for Mercedes: less invasive than a traditional sternotomy, with the likelihood of a quicker recovery and a decreased risk of complications.

On September 22, 2023, Mercedes underwent her repair, performed by the joint Heart to Heart-San Juan de Dios team. Her surgery went smoothly, and she was discharged from the ICU just four days later.

For older patients, such as Mercedes, timely intervention of heart valve disease dramatically improves quality of life and prevents end-stage heart failure. Mercedes can look forward to enjoying her full life expectancy with the next three generations of her family.

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

## PATIENT PROFILE

Name	Mercedes Z.
Age	75 years old
DOB	February 10, 1948
Home	San Juan Grande, Costa Rica
Diagnosis	Mitral valve insufficiency
Open heart surgery	Mitral valve repair via right minithoracotomy
Date of procedure	September 22, 2023
Discharged from ICU	September 26, 2023