



UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
HEART INSTITUTE
INSTITUT DE CARDIOLOGIE
DE L'UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA

FOUNDATION
FONDATION

From the desk of:

Dr. Thierry Mesana

President and Chief Executive Officer
University of Ottawa Heart Institute

Over the years, I have witnessed countless medical breakthroughs and advancements.

When I embarked on my journey as a young cardiac surgeon almost forty-five years ago, I felt like I was venturing into uncharted territory.

The early 1980s marked an era of innovation, where almost everything in the field of cardiac surgery was ground-breaking. I was fortunate to lead a team in France that achieved several significant milestones, including the first, longest successful heart transplant of the 70s and 80s. The patient's name was Emmanuel Vitria, a well-known advocate of cardiac health. Astoundingly, he lived for an additional twenty years after his surgery. At the time, he was the world's longest survivor of a human heart transplant—when previously a year had been the average!

My motivation for entering the field of medicine was always rooted in a deep-seated desire to serve people.

As a young surgeon in Africa, I found myself 500 kilometres from any big hospital during my military service. I delivered between 700 and 800 babies and performed a wide array of surgeries. We brought water from a far-off well to be sanitized for surgery, and we needed to run generators at night to keep the surgical lights on. I look back fondly on that time.

I share these memories with you, knowing we need your generous help in moving forward. Your donations continue to fund improvements to cardiovascular care, including education, new and ongoing research, as well as innovative treatments.

When you give to the Heart Institute Foundation, you support a caring team that puts patient's needs first.



From my early career, another memory stands out—how I performed my first open-heart surgery on my very first day as surgeon. It was remarkable to see with my own eyes a beating heart in the chest of a five-year-old boy who had severe congenital heart disease. Decades later, the image of the profound love and relief that washed over the faces of that child’s parents as their little one woke up remains etched in my mind. Later that same day, I told my mother, **“Mom, cardiac surgery has gotten into my blood today...I will be a heart surgeon!”**

It was ‘love at first sight’ and to this day I still feel this way.

I also warmly remember what it was like to pass through the Institute’s doors in 2001. I travelled from my home in France to become the Chief of Cardiac Surgery in Ottawa. The facility was much smaller then, but the atmosphere was the same. Each nurse, doctor, staff member and volunteer put the patient first and persists in doing so today. The number of staff has doubled, and so has the number of patients we serve, now well over 212,000 a year. We have grown immensely with your help.

After almost ten years at the helm, this is my final correspondence to you, our donors, as CEO of the Heart Institute. I have worked diligently in building this world-class organization, inspired by our community’s faith and support. Now, I must pass the torch to our next leader and ask that you continue to share your belief in our work and our purpose. We need your help to continue to build the next chapter of the Institute.

As I look back over the decades, there are so many changes, but what remains is that the Ottawa Heart Institute continues to be committed to continual improvement and innovation to benefit all people and families that we serve. For instance, I am very proud of our commitment to women’s heart health and the opening of the **Canadian Women’s Heart Health Centre** in 2014. It supports better awareness, treatments, and research for heart disease—Canada’s number one killer of women.

At the Institute, our team spirit supports world-class cardiac care. We have all the right people, perspectives, and information accessible for each patient—at the right time. Our heart teams include surgeons, cardiologists, specialists, and researchers who find ways to work together daily on treatments for your specific disease.

In the Ottawa Heart Institute’s almost 50-year history, the community has continued to make this place even better by investing in much-needed renovations like new hybrid operating rooms and the revitalized Intensive Care Areas. Thanks to your support, we have educated the next generation of medical minds and secured state-of-the-art equipment.

I’m grateful to have followed in the footsteps of the Institute’s co-founders, the visionaries Dr. Wilbert Keon, a cardiac surgeon, and cardiologist Dr. Donald Beanlands. They pioneered a new collaborative approach to treating heart disease that we have expanded on today.



Coming back to where I started...I still think of the Operating Room as a temple—it is a sacred place. I always told my trainees that we needed to push for perfection, and excellence was not enough for a heart surgeon because the stakes were too high. In some ways, we were like Jedis, performing a duty to society and striving for something exceptional. We are a team that makes each person perform better.

However, we still have challenges. Valvular heart disease is the fastest-growing condition we see today, often leading to heart failure. We need more research to detect this disease earlier, ensuring patients have improved futures and healthier lives. When I started out in cardiac surgery, I focused on repairing heart valves and hearts rather than trying to replace them. After decades of leading and teaching in this specialization, the Institute's heart valve repair program has become recognized as one of the best in the world.

That is why I am also excited about the future. We are on the cusp of more incredible breakthroughs in personalized medicine using the latest scientific tools. Technology is already starting to help customize patient treatment plans. This fall, we launched the Data Science Centre, a first of its kind in Canada, dedicated to studying cardiovascular disease as healthcare moves forward with even greater innovation. For instance, I am very proud of our well-established STEMI program that unblocks arteries in the hour after a heart attack. We have heart teams ready 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, even on Christmas and holidays.

Right now, when you support the Heart Institute Foundation, you fund 'Canada's Heart Institute.' We serve patients from Ontario, Newfoundland, the North, and Quebec. Our research is national, with international collaborations. We will be here ready for you when you need us most.

In Canada, we take care of people. Without exaggeration, the Heart Institute has been a beacon for the entire country, and even worldwide, since it opened its doors in 1976. Other cardiac centres look to us for advice and ideas. We are in contact with healthcare facilities that want to be a Heart Institute just like us.

I look back at how far we've come. For instance, ten years ago, a patient would need to have their chest opened, typically spending an average of five hours on the operating table in surgery, and ten days in hospital. Now, for the same type of surgery, they can go through a one-hour procedure using a catheter through the groin and be home the same day.

In the early 1970s, before the Institute opened its doors, there was no real way to get a person's heart back into its regular rhythm. If someone had a heart attack, they were prescribed a lifetime of rest and advised to avoid any rigorous activity *ever again*. **Now, patients can live long and active lives with improved detection, prevention, prescription medicine, rehabilitation, and surgery.**

We are passionate about prevention at our *Cardiovascular Rehabilitation & Wellness Centre*, we focus on two types: primary prevention to *protect first* so people can reduce their risk of heart disease, and secondary prevention to *protect further* so patients can recover and become stronger after disease. We want to avoid hospital admittance to keep individuals where they



are healthiest and happiest, which is at home. We must use all the new and emerging tools and advancements to support this wish.

When you give to the Foundation today...you help to keep our Heart Institute at the forefront of medical breakthroughs and compassionate care. Without generous donations to the Foundation like yours, we would not be in the world's top 5% of cardiac research centres.

I was always happy to perform open-heart surgery on Christmas. My greatest honour was to help save lives, along with the Heart Institute team. Afterwards, I would drive home and gather around the Christmas tree with my wife and children to celebrate just being with them and feeling very grateful.

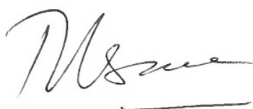
Our patients going home to their families, especially during the holidays, matters so much to me. I am sure you feel the same way, too. You may have your own heart story, or someone you love was treated at the Institute.

Thank you for taking a trip down memory lane with me.

Medicine is my life's work, and I have kept every patient's letter. It has been an honour to serve you and the Heart Institute.

Whichever way you celebrate, I wish you and your loved ones good health and the best of the season.

Sincerely,



Dr. Thierry Mesana
President and Chief Executive Officer
University of Ottawa Heart Institute

