

The Promise and Perils of Artificial Hearts

Eric Rose, MD

January 11, 2005

4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Atchley Loeb Conference Room
New York - Presbyterian Hospital
622 West 168th Street
New York, NY 10032

Eric Rose, MD, who is the Morris and Rose Milstein, Johnson & Johnson Professor of Surgery, Chairman of the Department of Surgery, and Surgeon-in-Chief at the Columbia University Medical Center, gave a stimulating presentation on the left ventricular assist device as destination therapy. In his long history, since 1982, dealing with failing hearts, Dr. Rose has had to face varied and profound dilemmas while developing increasingly effective mechanical heart assist devices. The audience heard how complex it can be to make reasoned decisions concerning topics such as: managing significant post-operative pain; defining reasonable quality of life; and how to provide extended out-of-hospital care and support for such critically ill patients. Dr. Rose highlighted the important concerns about using the mechanical heart assist device as a bridge to transplant, for long term use, or as destination therapy. His discussion of the cost of the operation and follow-up care was certainly impressive; one wonders how Medicare can absorb this expense if many more take advantage of this technology.

Dr. Rose emphasized the need for uniform national guidelines to address the circumstances under which a device can be turned off when a patient's treatment is futile but the device is functioning well. This was just one example of the many compelling ethical dilemmas that need close examination and attention in the future.