Atrial fibrillation is an irregular rhythm of the upper chambers of the heart. It is the most common heart rhythm problem and affects over 3 million Americans. The risk of stroke in people affected by atrial fibrillation is up to seven times the risk of stroke in the general population.

The Vanderbilt Heart Center for Atrial Fibrillation is dedicated to providing the expert care necessary to treat patients with atrial fibrillation. Using state-of-the-art techniques and therapies, our cardiac specialists determine what is best for each person’s unique needs.

We work as a team — cardiac arrhythmia physicians (electrophysiologists), cardiologists, cardiac surgeons and specially trained nurses and research scientists — to see that our patients get the best care options. The Center’s goal is to better understand the causes of arrhythmia, apply new therapies to better treat the disease, and use a patient’s genetic information to tailor a personalized, more effective treatment plan.

Our program is part of Vanderbilt Heart, the most comprehensive heart program in the region. Our location on the main campus of Vanderbilt Medical Center allows us to evaluate and treat our patients in one facility. Vanderbilt Heart is dedicated to delivering state-of-the-art care for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular disease.
UNDERSTANDING ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

During atrial fibrillation, the two small upper chambers of the heart quiver instead of beating effectively. Symptoms include:

- Heart Palpitations
- Weakness
- Lightheadedness
- Confusion
- Shortness of Breath
- Chest Pain

Some people do not experience any symptoms and a doctor’s examination uncovers the problem.

The most common cause of this disorder is an abnormality or damage to the heart’s structure that can occur with heart disease or high blood pressure. The likelihood of developing atrial fibrillation increases with age. Other risk factors include chronic thyroid problems, sleep apnea, alcohol use or family history.
Because each heart problem is different, we use several tests to diagnosis atrial fibrillation. These include, but are not limited, to:

- **Electrocardiogram (ECG)** — electrodes measure electrical impulses given off by your heart and are recorded as waves
- **Holter Monitor** — a small external device worn for a few days that also uses electrodes to gather information about your heart’s rhythm
- **Event Recorders** — similar to a Holter monitor, but used to diagnose rhythm disturbances that occur at unpredictable times
- **Echocardiogram** — sound waves are used to produce a video image of your heart in motion
- **Blood Tests** — can be used to see if you have thyroid problems or blood abnormalities
TREATING YOUR ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

The Vanderbilt Heart Center for Atrial Fibrillation takes a comprehensive, yet individualized, approach to your treatment. Options include medications used to return the heart to its normal rhythm, control medications that help slow the heart rate during atrial fibrillation, and medications to prevent blood clots and reduce the risk of stroke.

If medications are not the most appropriate treatment or if they are not effective, we offer various procedures, devices and surgery to help control atrial fibrillation:

- Electrical Cardioversion
- Catheter Ablation
- Pulmonary Vein Isolation
- Ablation of the AV Node
- Permanent Pacemaker
- Surgical Maze Procedure
- Minimally Invasive Surgery

SURGICAL SPECIALTY

One of the specialties of the new center is performing surgery-based atrial fibrillation ablations. This procedure, often performed using minimally invasive techniques, disrupts the electrical pathways responsible for atrial fibrillation. Early results indicate that this procedure could provide a cure for patients.
ARRHYTHMIA/ELECTROPHYSIOLOGY

Dawood Darbar, M.D., Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine and Pharmacology
Director, Vanderbilt Arrhythmia Center
M.D.: University of Dundee, Scotland
Postgraduate Training: Vanderbilt University Medical Center; Mayo Clinic

Christopher R. Ellis, M.D.
Assistant Professor of Medicine
M.D.: University of Rochester School of Medicine
Postgraduate Training: Vanderbilt University Medical Center; University of Michigan

Pablo J. Saavedra, M.D.
Assistant Professor of Medicine
M.D.: Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine
Postgraduate Training: Vanderbilt University Medical Center; Brown University Memorial Hospital; Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine

S. Patrick Whalen, M.D.
Assistant Professor of Medicine
M.D.: Wake Forest University
Postgraduate Training: Vanderbilt University Medical Center; Emory University

CARDIAC SURGERY

Steven J. Hoff, M.D.
Assistant Professor of Cardiac Surgery
M.D.: The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine
Postgraduate Training: Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Michael R. Petracek, M.D.
Professor of Cardiac Surgery
M.D.: The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine
Postgraduate Training: Vanderbilt University Medical Center; The Johns Hopkins Hospital
To make an appointment, simply call 615-322-2318 Monday through Friday from 8 am until 5 pm, CST.

Fax: 615-936-1711

EMERGENCY CALLS
For urgent physician needs or to transfer a patient, please call 866-886-2478 or 615-343-9188 to reach the access coordinator.

Our guarantee: A person will answer the phone within two rings, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

RED COAT VOLUNTEERS
The Vanderbilt Heart Red Coats are volunteers from the community who welcome you as you arrive. They are stationed in Medical Center East at the second floor entrance. Many of our Red Coat volunteers have been patients here or have had loved ones cared for at Vanderbilt. They are happy to escort you and your family members to your clinic appointment.
The Vanderbilt Heart Atrial Fibrillation Center is located in Medical Center East, South Tower. Please use our free valet parking service for easy access. It is available on 21st Ave between Dixie Pl. and Medical Center Drive. For self parking, turn at Dixie Pl.

Valet parking is always free.

If you choose to self-park, remember to have your ticket stamped at the registration desk for complimentary parking.