A generation ago, adult cardiologists had little need to study congenital heart disease. Few children born with these heart conditions lived to adult age. Great advances have been made during the past few decades in caring for children with major structural heart issues (congenital heart diseases), allowing survival to adulthood and a productive life. Today, more adults are living with congenital heart disease than children with these conditions.

“With this rapidly growing population, there is a critical need to care for these patients. A congenital heart condition doesn’t go away at age 18,” says Scott Klewer, MD, professor of pediatrics in the UA College of Medicine - Tucson who specializes in pediatric cardiology. Dr. Klewer has been named the Sarver Heart Center’s Peggy M. Barrett Endowed Chair for Congenital Heart Disease in Adults and is a member of the UA Steele Children’s Research Center and the Sarver Heart Center.

“This is a tremendous opportunity for the University of Arizona College of Medicine and the Sarver Heart Center to become a leader in caring for these adult congenital heart disease patients and improving the training of cardiology fellows,” says Gordon A. Ewy, MD, director of the UA Sarver Heart Center.

“While we have started the groundwork to establish an adult congenital cardiology outpatient clinic, much more needs to be done. When Dr. Ewy offered the endowed chair to me, I saw this as an opportunity to make important strides toward fulfilling a dream of building a comprehensive adult congenital cardiology program for southern Arizona. Without the support of the Peggy M. Barrett Chair it would have taken much longer to achieve,” says Dr. Klewer.

“An academic medical center is an ideal setting for an adult congenital cardiology program. It will provide patients and their cardiologists in communities throughout Arizona with information and support, as well as train our fellows in this expanding population of adults living with moderate and complex congenital heart problems. Here, we have all the necessary expertise under one roof – pediatric and adult cardiology, pulmonary,
OB/Gyn, nutritionists, surgeons. The scope and expertise of the Sarver Heart Center membership truly reflects the multi-disciplinary medical team that is needed to care for this patient population,” says Dr. Klewer.

Who treats these patients now? “Too often we are reunited in the emergency department with past patients who are now adults living with congenital heart disease,” says Dr. Klewer. “This is difficult. Most congenital cardiology patients see their pediatric cardiologist up until age 25, but after that, the adult with congenital heart disease may go over 10 years without a check-up. These lapses in follow-up often do not permit testing or treatment before a situation becomes severe. A multi-disciplinary team, like ours, at an academic medical center is really needed to improve the health and wellness of the rapidly growing population of adults with congenital heart disease.”

Dr. Klewer, who called many of his adult patients “pioneers” as they were the first to survive repairs for their heart conditions, is seeking a better system that will reinforce the need for life-long care and facilitate the transition of patients from pediatric to adult congenital cardiology.

Successor to Ewy Endowed Chair Receives White Coat

“At the Sarver Heart Center reunion in February, Karl B. Kern, MD, was presented with his white coat, designating him as the Gordon A. Ewy, MD Distinguished Endowed Chair of Cardiovascular Medicine.

“It is a pleasure to know that with my upcoming retirement, this endowed chair will be filled by someone who has my highest regard. Karl and I have worked together for over three decades. He is an exceptional academic cardiologist, excelling in patient care, education and research,” says Dr. Gordon A. Ewy, director of the UA Sarver Heart Center. “He is a consummate clinical cardiologist, caring, hardworking, talented, honest, kind, and he has made exceptional contributions in medical research,” says Dr. Ewy.

About the Peggy M. Barrett Endowed Chair

Peggy Barrett was a long-time supporter of the University of Arizona and a patient of Dr. Gordon A. Ewy. She set up a charitable remainder annuity trust that paid her a set amount every year. When she passed away last October at age 88, the remaining amount designated for the UA Sarver Heart Center was sufficient to fund an endowed chair. She had an interest in children’s health issues and told the UA Foundation that she wanted “to make a difference and to perpetuate my enduring interests, goals and vision that will extend my influence beyond my lifetime.” For more information on gift annuities, please see the article on page 15.