

For Immediate Release
May 16, 2025

Contact:
Ronda Faries
rfaries@tanner.org

Inspired to Dream, Compelled to Heal

Carrollton, Georgia, is a very long way from Armenia, where Tanner Health's newest board-certified cardiothoracic surgeon was born during the Soviet Union's 71-year rule of that country.

Yet that is exactly where Jacob Davtyan, MD, who recently joined Tanner Heart & Vascular Specialists and the cardiothoracic surgery team at Adams Heart Center, first dared to dream of being a heart surgeon.

"I wanted to become a cardiac surgeon from a very young age," said Davtyan. "When the very first human-to-human heart transplant was done at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa, I was around 11 years old. I was very close to my grandmother, who was a retired operating room nurse. She said, 'listen, they took somebody's heart and put it into somebody else.' For a little kid, that was miraculous. I thought, how wonderful to be able to do that! And so, I kind of made up my mind. I'm going to be a heart surgeon. After years of hard work, it happened. I achieved my goal, and I'm living my dream."

Davtyan began his medical education in Armenia in the late 1970s at the Yerevan Medical Institute. In his third year of medical school, his family had a chance to get out of the Soviet Union by leaving Armenia, and they took that chance by moving to the United States.

"In 1981, after one year of study and exams, I was accepted to UCLA School of Medicine, where I graduated in 1983. Then, I was invited to stay at UCLA for my general surgery training. I did six years of general surgery training, of which one year was scientific lab work and research," said Davtyan. "After that, I was lucky to be accepted to the Emory University Cardiothoracic Surgery Fellowship Program, which at that time was one of the top two or three programs in the world. I finished my training at Emory in 1992."

After completing his fellowship, Davtyan moved back to California to be in private practice. In 2016, Robert Guyton, MD, his mentor and teacher at Emory University, asked him to move back to Georgia to run a cardiothoracic surgery program in Columbus, Georgia, which he did for eight-and-a-half years.

The stars continued to align for the now well-seasoned cardiothoracic surgeon. At an Emory University event, Davtyan ran into a former Emory University colleague, Omar Lattouf, MD, who started Tanner Health's open-heart surgery program in 2023. Lattouf invited Davtyan to check out the new program — and he did.

“Dr. Lattouf did a wonderful job. The surgical results are outstanding. But he needed a partner. He said, ‘do you want to come work with me?’ And so, I looked at the job, and decided it’s time to move. So here I am,” said Davtyan. “Believe it or not, Dr. Lattouf was one of my professors when I was in training at Emory. He was one of the recent graduates of the same program. We did our first operation together in 1989. Two days ago at Tanner, we did another case. I said, ‘Omar, 36 years later, we are in the operating room together again doing open-heart surgery. That’s a dream come true!’”

When Davtyan first came to Carrollton and toured the Adams Heart Center at Tanner Medical Center/Carrollton and other facilities, his first impression was that “it is beautiful, it is well equipped, and I see a lot of happy people.” He also thought the latter spoke volumes both about the staff and environment that they work in. And he was impressed with the determination of Tanner Health administration to bring high-quality open-heart surgical care to the community.

“So far, it’s been wonderful,” said Davtyan. “The people are very nice, willing to help, open-minded, interested. We have a very good foundation to build upon, and I’m so excited. I’m looking forward to doing more cases and to be part of this community.”

Davtyan comes to the Carrollton community with a family that is also medically inclined. He is proud of his wife, a speech pathologist whom he met in California at St. Bernadine Hospital, and their two daughters, 21 and 24. Both are now at Boston University, the oldest studying to become a physician and the youngest studying psychology and minoring in Italian Studies.

Davtyan credits his humble beginnings in Armenia for giving him the most meaningful thing that he can provide to his patients beyond his surgical skills: compassion.

“Over the years, I learned that patients with heart and lung disease have an incredibly difficult journey. They are frequently scared. Many of them could have never thought that they would need open-heart or lung surgery. And, imagine, that to repair the heart most of the time we have to stop it! That’s what makes our specialty so unique. The patients entrust us with their lives, even though they do not know us. Personal interaction with each patient is extremely important and helps to establish a trusting relationship between me and my patients,” said Davtyan. “It is vital for patients to feel that their surgeon cares deeply about them and will do everything possible to return them to normal life. The fundamental part of my philosophy for patient care is to be honest, open and receptive to their concerns and compassionate towards them. I let the patients know that I will take care of them as if they are my own family. Invariably this puts the patients at ease and allows them to concentrate on the treatment process.”

“Another important part of my job is educating the patient’s family,” said Davtyan. “Typically, the family is overwhelmed by an enormous amount of information. They are anxious and apprehensive since they usually do not expect their loved one to have heart disease or suffer a heart attack. They need a clear explanation of the patient’s condition, his or her treatment and prognosis. The family needs to feel that the patient is in capable hands.”

It takes a great team to perform open-heart surgery, which he explained is very much like a symphony orchestra.

“If you're going to make great music, you must have every member of that orchestra performing at an outstanding level. Otherwise, a beautiful melody is not going to happen. It's the same thing with cardiac surgery. As the leader of the team, I'm the conductor of that orchestra,” said Davtyan. “It's my job to bring out the best in everybody so that the patient can have the best possible operation and outcome. We have an outstanding cardiac surgery team at Tanner, including anesthesia, perfusion, physician assistants, nurses and techs.”

The postoperative period is equally important for good patient recovery, according to Davtyan. He explained that it is essential to pay attention to every detail.

“We round on patients every day, examine them, check vital signs, labs, X-rays and electrocardiograms,” said Davtyan. “We have excellent ICU nurses, respiratory and physical therapists, techs and others. It takes many people's effort to carry this to success.”

Davtyan's advice to his new community of potential patients?

“Do you have a family history of heart disease? Then, you may want to pay more attention to your heart. Are you having chest pains, shortness of breath or feel tired? Something doesn't feel right?” he asked. “Don't neglect it. Ask for help. See your doctor, express your concerns. The most important part: do not smoke. That's the worst thing that we can do. Always follow your heart. Your heart is telling you something.”

To find a cardiologist or cardiothoracic surgery specialist on Tanner Health's staff, visit tanner.org/find-a-provider.

###