

UW Health: Patient able to be taken off the heart transplant list after treatment with an LVAD and bariatric surgery

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MADISON, Wis. – In an extremely rare outcome, UW Health patient Tom Satterlee was taken off the heart transplant list last month because his weight loss surgery enabled his heart function to improve.

The Rockford native's journey began in 2012 when he had a left ventricular assist device (LVAD) inserted to help his heart function. An LVAD is a device implanted in a patient's chest to help a weakened heart pump blood. It is often considered a temporary measure until the patient can get a new heart.

The LVAD helped with Tom's heart; but to get on the heart transplant list, Tom also needed to lose weight. At 436 pounds, he decided he needed weight loss (bariatric) surgery.

On December 26th of 2017, Tom underwent a sleeve gastrectomy performed by Dr. Michael Garren, a UW Health bariatric surgeon. Since the surgery, Tom has lost more than 200 pounds.

At the end of August 2020, Tom didn't feel quite right. A known risk associated with an LVAD is clotting of the device, which turned out to be the case here. Eventually, Tom underwent surgery at University Hospital on September 3 to replace his LVAD. However, when the UW Health heart surgeons went to replace it, his heart function had improved enough that the heart pump was able to be removed and Tom's heart was able to pump blood adequately without assistance. Only about two percent of

patients can have an LVAD removed without a heart transplant. Tom credits his weight loss surgery team and countless healthcare staff at UW Health for getting him off the heart transplant list and saving his life.

Video and interviews with Tom and Dr. Garren are available.