

## Special Feature

# In Memoriam – University of Michigan Transplant Flight Team, June 4, 2007

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It started as an ordinary Monday in June at the University of Michigan (UM) Transplant Center in Ann Arbor. Organs from a donor in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, had been offered for a patient on our waiting list. A team of two surgeons and two transplant donation specialists left from Willow Run Airport in Ypsilanti, Michigan, 8 miles east of Ann Arbor, under the able command of two veteran pilots, to fly to Milwaukee in a Cessna Citation 550 jet. The 40-min flight across the state and Lake Michigan was uneventful. The organ procurement was successfully completed and the team prepared to return to Ann Arbor.

The story should have been an example of what my friend and transplant colleague Jeffrey D. Punch, M.D., calls the everyday miracle of transplantation'. Instead, Monday, June 4, 2007, ended in a tragedy. Shortly after takeoff, the airplane experienced an as yet unknown malfunction. In an instant, six wonderful men were taken from us and the donor organs were lost when the airplane crashed into the Lake Michigan.

Aboard the aircraft were:

- David Ashburn, M.D., a UM resident in cardiothoracic surgery
- Richard Chenault II, a UM transplant donation specialist
- Dennis Hoyes, a Marlin Air pilot
- Richard Lapensee, a UM transplant donation specialist
- William Serra, a Marlin Air pilot
- Martinus (Martin) Spoor, M.D., a UM cardiothoracic surgeon

David Ashburn, M.D., 35, of Dexter, Michigan, joined the University of Michigan in 2005 as a resident in cardiothoracic surgery. He was to have begun a fellowship in pediatric cardiovascular surgery in July. Ashburn graduated from Quillen College of Medicine at East Tennessee State University in 1998 and completed general surgery residency training at Wake Forest University. In 2003, he finished a 2-year congenital heart surgery fellowship at the University of Toronto. He served as a chief resident at Wake

Forest's Bowman Gray campus from 2004–05. Ashburn is survived by his wife, Candice, and three children.

Richard Chenault II, 44, of Ann Arbor, Michigan, joined the UM in 1985 as a laboratory technician and served as a transplant donation specialist with the University of Michigan Transplant Center for 10 years. In 2006, he received the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' distinguished Medal of Honor for his efforts to increase organ donation. He was part of a team that helped UM to achieve an organ donation rate of more than 75 percent, establishing UM as one of the leading organ donor hospitals in the nation. He is survived by his wife, a daughter and a stepson.

Rick LaPensee, 48, of Van Buren Township, Michigan, joined the UM Transplant Center as a part-time transplant donation specialist in 2005. He had served as an emergency medical technician and firefighter for the city of Ypsilanti for 14 years. LaPensee is survived by his wife of 23 years and two sons.

Martinus (Martin) Spoor, M.D., 37 and an Ann Arbor, Michigan, resident, was a clinical instructor at the UM Medical School in the Section of Cardiac Surgery. A native of Canada, Spoor received his medical degree from the University of Calgary in Alberta in 1995, and completed a cardiac surgery residency and research fellowship at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, and his strategic training fellowship at the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta. Spoor came to the UM in 2003 for a Heart Failure Fellowship, which he completed in 2005, followed by a Critical Care Fellowship completed in 2006. He is survived by his wife and three children.

Dennis Hoyes, 65, was a pilot with Marlin Air, Inc, Hoyes worked in the insurance industry and as professional pilot flew executive flights in various aircraft. He had flown the Cessna for the past 10 years. Hoyes is survived by his wife and two children.

William (Bill) Serra, 59, was Marlin Air's chief pilot and check airman, responsible for ensuring the proficiency of Marlin Air pilots. With more than 12 000 flight hours in a wide range of aircraft, he had a long track record of achievements including receipt of the Air Medal from the President of the United States for outstanding achievements while

participating in aerial flights, and the 1993 Air Force Desert Storm and Desert Shield award as a civilian pilot for supplying materials and ammunition during Desert Storm. Serra is survived by his wife and three children.

Each of these men loved their profession. Each of them willingly gave of their time, their expertise and passion

to the singular objective of improving the lives of others through transplantation. We grieve their loss, and offer our sympathies and support to their bereaved wives, children and families. As we go forward, we will search for meaning in their premature departure from our midst, and honor their memories by continuing our efforts on behalf of all those who may benefit from organ transplantation.