Family Thanks Surgeons For In Utero Procedure

PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Physicians from North Shore University Hospital and Cohen Children's Medical Center of New York today introduced a boy who underwent a life-saving in utero heart procedure 4-1/2 months into his mother's pregnancy. It was one of only 10 such procedures ever recorded in worldwide medical literature and the first performed in the New York area.

Now 10 months old, Dante Francis was diagnosed in utero at 13 weeks with a large pericardial effusion, a potentially life-threatening heart condition in which there is a dangerous accumulation of fluid within the pericardium that can decrease the amount of blood pumped from the heart. The fluid build-up around the heart is dangerous because it can lead to heart failure and compress the lungs.

Doctors determined that an in utero procedure was necessary at this early stage to prevent heart failure and the death of the baby in the womb, and to allow the lungs to grow normally. When the fetus was 18 weeks old (and only about seven inches long), a team of maternal/fetal experts headed by Nidhi Vohra, M.D., of North Shore University Hospital (NSUH) and pediatric specialists from Cohen Children's Medical Center came together to perform an in utero pericardiocentesis on a heart the size of a quarter that's thumping at between 120 and 160 beats per minute.

Using ultrasound technology for guidance, Dr. Vohra inserted a needle through the abdomen of the baby's mother, Suzanne Francis, and guided it into the pericardial sac. About a half-teaspoon of fluid was drained from the fetal pericardial sac, an astonishing amount for a heart so tiny. "This is an extremely rare procedure," said Dr. Vohra, associate chief of maternal/fetal medicine at NSUH and director of prenatal diagnosis for the North Shore-LIJ Health System. "We're so proud of the fact that, working together as a team, we were able to achieve this wonderful result."

Accompanied by his mother, father Robert Francis, and four-year-old sister Madeline, a healthy baby Dante was introduced at NSUH. "It was the hardest decision I ever made, but I felt like I had to do it," Ms. Francis said when asked if she was concerned about undergoing the procedure. "I really had to trust our doctors." Also present to meet baby Dante were Angela Romano, M.D., a pediatric cardiologist at Cohen Children's Medical Center, who performed fetal echocardiograms during the pregnancy to monitor Dante's condition, and Micheline Chu, M.D., a reproductive endocrinologist at NSUH's Center for Human Reproduction, who performed the intrauterine insemination that started baby Dante on this journey to life.
"We were only given a two percent chance of conception because of my age," said Ms. Francis, age 46. "We are especially happy to see the family here today and to celebrate Dante's first ten months of life," said Dr. Vohra.

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