ACHD Patients – What to Expect for Cardiac Catheterization

Patients with adult congenital heart disease (ACHD) may be referred to UAB for a cardiac catheterization, which is a diagnostic and often therapeutic procedure performed through blood vessels in the legs and neck using long tubes called catheters. The catheters are used to gather information about the heart and lungs and also may be used to close holes, place stents, or implant valves. In many cases, a cardiac catheterization procedure allows you to avoid or postpone traditional open-heart surgery.

UAB physicians perform cardiac catheterizations on adult patients at Children's of Alabama, where you will be admitted through the 4th floor preadmission area and given an opportunity to meet the staff to further discuss the details of the procedure. All cardiac catheterizations are performed in a "cath lab" by congenital cardiologists who have undergone advanced training in interventional cardiology, the medical specialty that focuses on catheter-based procedures.

Once you have been scheduled for a cardiac catheterization, we will provide detailed instructions concerning eating, drinking, and medications prior to your time of arrival. All procedures are performed under general anesthesia, which is administered by a dedicated cardiovascular anesthesiologist. In most cases, to minimize discomfort, your IV will be placed after some anesthesia has been administered.

A cardiac catheterization procedure often lasts longer than three hours, so our nursing staff is available to update your loved ones on the progress. You will recover in the post-anesthesia care unit following the procedure. Many patients can be discharged the same day of the procedure, though a brief hospital stay may be required in some cases.

The UAB Adult Congenital Heart Disease program is committed to making your procedure as comfortable and convenient as possible. If you have any questions or need special arrangements, please don't hesitate to contact us at (205) 934-3460.