



# A Lifeline to Cardiac Expertise

When Alan C. struggled to determine his options for care after being diagnosed with a heart valve defect, he sought a Virtual Second Opinion by Cleveland Clinic.

**Getting a second opinion is really important. Don't always go with what the first opinion is. Find out what your options are, and make sure you explore those options before you decide to have surgery of any type.**

– Alan C., 76,  
who underwent heart valve repair surgery in February 2021 after receiving a Virtual Second Opinion by Cleveland Clinic

## The Challenge

Alan C. was sitting in his recliner one night in July 2020 when he felt a dull ache in the center of his chest. "It would come and go," says Alan, who lives in New Mexico. "At first, I didn't really think much of it. I thought it was indigestion. I took a pill for acid reflux, but when that didn't work, I told my wife, 'I'm not going to be able to sleep through this. I think we'd better go to the emergency room.'"

Four hours later, Alan was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation, a condition that caused his heart to

race at more than 150 beats per minute. When Alan experienced a second episode two weeks later, a technician performed a transesophageal echocardiogram that examined the structures of his heart. It was then that doctors discovered he had a prolapsed mitral valve. It's a condition that prevented the valve between the upper and lower left chambers of the heart from closing.

**"I was a college basketball player. I've been athletic most of my life," Alan says. "It came as a surprise."**

Alan and his wife met with a cardiac surgeon near home, who told him the valve would either need to be repaired or replaced. The surgeon wouldn't know until he observed Alan's heart valve during surgery whether repair or replacement would be needed.

But Alan struggled to connect with the surgeon during that visit. He and his wife left the appointment with more questions than answers. Their discomfort during the office visit made them uncertain how to proceed.

## The Solution

Alan spoke with a friend who had recently had surgery at Cleveland Clinic. "He said, 'You should get a second opinion from Cleveland Clinic. They do second opinions online, and it's all very seamless,'"



Alan remembers. “He said in the big scheme of things, it could provide the reassurance I needed.”

Alan called and spoke with Stephanie S., an intake nurse for the virtual second opinion program.

“She was absolutely fabulous,” Alan says. “It’s really important to have that first point of contact be a comfortable, soothing, reassuring presence. Stephanie was passionate and concerned, and she answered a lot of questions. We emailed each other for several days.”

Stephanie assisted in digitally obtaining Alan’s medical records, and his case was assigned to [Daniel Burns, MD](#), a cardiac surgeon who specializes specifically in heart valve surgery. After Dr. Burns provided his written report, Alan and his wife spoke directly with him by video conference.

“We were very comfortable with him and impressed with the depth of his experience,” Alan says. “He had all my information, including the tests that were transferred to Cleveland Clinic, and it was clear that he understood what was wrong and had treated other patients with my condition. That put us at ease. We made a decision that day to seek care from Dr. Burns. We didn’t dither around.”

Alan traveled from New Mexico to the main Cleveland Clinic campus in Ohio, where the surgery took place. “Everything went like greased lightning,” Alan says, as Dr. Burns repaired his heart valve during surgery.

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– Alan C.

### **Why a Virtual Second Opinion by Cleveland Clinic Made the Difference**

“The ability to talk with someone who was intimately familiar with my heart condition and who performs hundreds of these procedures per year was critical,” Alan says. “When you’re facing heart surgery, you want to know that you’re speaking with someone who is aware of what the complications could be and is prepared. I’m pleased that we made the decision to seek a Virtual Second Opinion by Cleveland Clinic.”

If you’re interested in a virtual second opinion from experts at Cleveland Clinic, visit [www.theclinic.io](http://www.theclinic.io).

*With The Clinic, patients have virtual access to 3,500 leading Cleveland Clinic specialists with expertise in more than 550 advanced subspecialties—all available through a computer or mobile device. Cases are reviewed by professionals with expertise in a patient’s specific medical condition, leading to less doubt and greater peace of mind when it comes to both treatment plans and patient outcomes. For more information, visit [www.theclinic.io](http://www.theclinic.io).*

