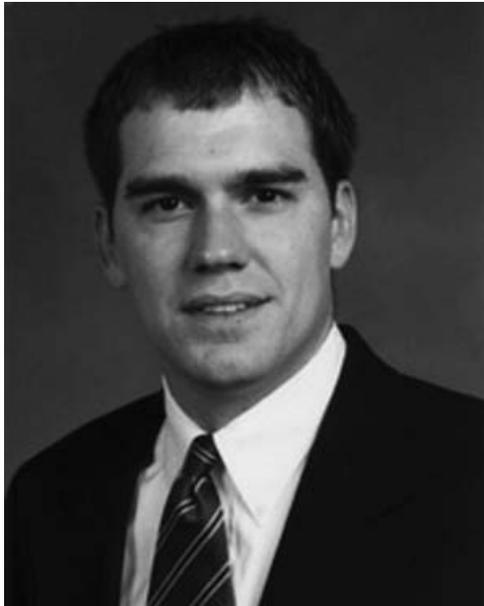


Obituary

David A. Ashburn June 29, 1971–June 4, 2007



ON JUNE 4, 2007, OUR SPECIALTY LOST SOMEONE special. Many of you might not have heard of him yet, but you soon would. David Ashburn, aged 35, died in a tragic plane crash that day while returning to Ann Arbor after harvesting organs for a transplant that was to take place at the University of Michigan. In all, 6 individuals lost their lives in the events of that fateful day when their plane lost control and crashed into the waters of Lake Michigan. This tragedy shook our University and, indeed, the entire medical community. Transplants have become so common, so routine, that we take for granted the everyday drama and risk that occurs each time a team travels to procure organs in an effort to save the life of another.

David was only weeks away from realizing a goal he worked so hard to achieve. On July 1, 2007 he was to finish his residency in Cardiothoracic Surgery, and begin a fellowship in Pediatric Cardiac Surgery with us in Ann Arbor. To become a pediatric cardiac surgeon was a dream of David's, one that he felt a calling for. During his general

surgery residency at Wake Forest University, David cemented his career goals, and spent two years as a clinical outcomes research fellow at the Data Center for the Congenital Heart Surgeons' Society in Toronto. He completed his Master's degree during that time, and was the primary author on numerous major publications coming from the Data Center, and produced on behalf of the Congenital Heart Surgeon's Society. David was the first John W. Kirklin Fellow, an honour that acknowledged his major role both in the establishment and the productivity of that fellowship. The late John Kirklin was the originator of the Data Center. In honour of David's own contributions, all future fellows will be referred to as the John W. Kirklin/David A. Ashburn Fellow.

David's interests went far beyond congenital cardiac surgery. He was a man of faith, a devoted husband and father, and an avid hunter and outdoorsman. He believed that it was God's mission for him to help heal others. When he wasn't in the hospital, or playing with his children, David could usually be found turkey hunting or watching NASCAR, two of his passions. Needless to say, both of these activities were not too commonplace in Ann Arbor, a fact that led to many spirited discussions in the operating room.

David was destined for an outstanding career in congenital cardiac surgery. He was bright, dedicated, hard working, and possessed outstanding surgical talents. In short, he was a natural. None of us had any doubt that his future was certain, and that he would continue making contributions as an academic pediatric cardiac surgeon, both in and out of the operating room.

On the night David died, I went to David's home to inform his wife, Candice, of the tragic news. Word of the accident had already begun to spread through the media, and Candice knew that David was off on a transplant run. He called her just before he boarded that fateful return flight, as he always did. I was amazed at Candice's strength during that awful time. As Candice herself put it: "My children

and I are resting in our faith in Jesus Christ. We are comforted by the assurance of David's presence in heaven."

David will be missed by many, including his wife and 3 children, the members of his church, friends, colleagues, and the many children who will never get to benefit from his talents as a cardiac surgeon. But he lives on in our medical community, and will forever be remembered as a loving husband and father, devoted surgeon, and a true friend.

Edward L. Bove
Director, Pediatric Cardiovascular Surgery
Congenital Heart Center
F7830 Mott Children's Hospital
1500 East Medical Center Drive
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-0223
USA
Tel: 00 1 734 936 4980;
Fax: 00 1 734 763 7353;
E-mail: elbove@umich.edu