

patients with stroke. A decade ago, her research team was the first to identify a significant, early inflammatory response in the small blood vessels of the brain after stroke. She received the *Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers* for these seminal findings. Since then, her laboratory studies have considered the relationships between inflammation and factors such as diabetes, aging and ethnicity. She currently is working on a study to understand the relationships among inflammatory genes, novel inflammatory blood markers and traditional risk factors in African Americans with stroke.

In addition to her research efforts, Dr. Ritter has been extremely effective in building interprofessional team skills for delivery of stroke services. In 2009, Dr. Ritter was a leader in University Medical Center's effort to become Tucson's first primary stroke center in Southern Arizona and continues as a coordinator for the stroke program. Dr. Ritter has dedicated herself to mentoring UA undergraduate and graduate students from a variety of health-related disciplines in stroke research and educating the public about stroke recognition and prevention.

"The chair will help research be done that can save people's lives. Stroke is a big problem and more work needs to be done to prevent and treat stroke," says Hope.

"Ultimately, this endowed chair is a testament and a commitment to improve the health and well-being of people who have suffered a stroke," says David Labiner, MD, head of neurology at the UA.

Adds Max, "The chair is very important for the future of stroke research; you never know what the future holds ... , but continued hard work is very important for discovery!" ♥

New Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery Named to Copeland Chair



Robert Poston, MD

Robert Poston, MD, nationally known for using robotics for minimally invasive coronary bypass surgery, is now professor and chief of the Division of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery in the UA Department of Surgery, and a new co-director and *Jack G. Copeland, MD, Endowed Chair of Cardiothoracic Surgery* in the UA Sarver Heart Center.

His appointment makes University Medical Center the only hospital in Arizona, and one of only a handful in the nation, to offer robot-assisted minimally invasive coronary artery bypass surgery.

This surgery allows physicians to gain access to the heart with small incisions, unlike conventional bypass surgery which requires the chest to be opened with an incision by cutting through the breastbone (sternum). "With the robotic procedure, the patient has smaller scars, fewer side effects and complications, less pain, reduced risk of infection and faster recovery than with conventional bypass graft surgery," says Dr. Poston. "On average, hospital stay is reduced from six to three days."

"My aim for our division is to provide distinctive services that are highly valued by patients and their families," says Dr. Poston, who previously served as chief of cardiac surgery at Boston Medical Center. "Robot-assisted heart surgery is a prime example. Similarly, our internationally renowned mechanical-assist program can improve the quality of life for those with severe congestive heart failure."

Dr. Poston, who has authored more than 100 scientific papers and abstracts, is the principal investigator on several multicenter research studies. In a five-year initiative funded by the National Institutes of Health, he is exploring the use of high-resolution imaging technology during heart surgery to identify the optimal bypass graft for a patient. He also is investigating the ability of robotic surgery to accelerate the return of exercise tolerance compared to traditional surgical techniques.

"Besides bringing an innovative surgical method to the UA, we are very excited about Dr. Poston's research expertise," says Gordon A. Ewy, MD, director of the UA Sarver Heart Center.

"It is exciting to welcome Dr. Poston to the department," said Rainer Gruessner, MD, professor and chairman of the UA Department of Surgery. "As one of the foremost experts in minimally invasive cardiac surgery, Dr. Poston's arrival launches the University of Arizona into a new era of innovative heart care."

About the Copeland Chair

Jack Copeland, MD, one of the founders of the UA Sarver Heart Center and a legendary pioneer of heart transplantation and artificial heart technology at University Medical Center, served the UA for 33 years before leaving to establish a new program in California. When he celebrated 25 years as a distinguished faculty member here, Dr. Copeland's grateful patients, friends and colleagues established an endowed chair in support of the cardiothoracic surgery team. More than 400 families contributed to this endowment, a testament to their gratitude for the life-saving, innovative care provided by the transplant team.