


Volume 10 — Robotics Issue


Queen of the Valley  
Medical Center   
ST. JOSEPH  
HEALTH SYSTEM

Founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange

# Health Focus

**Queen of the Valley**  
*Circle of Friends*

**Back Out in the World**



Janice Howard is back on the course.

# Enjoying Good Food the Golf Course Again

ACHALASIA IS DEFINITELY NOT A common household word. But when Janice Howard heard it described to her, light bulbs went off in her head.

“I had been suffering with terrible stomachaches and what seemed like acid reflux for years,” Janice says. “I went to all kinds of doctors and no one seemed to be able to figure out what was causing it. My husband, James, was incredibly

supportive, but over time it got steadily worse and worse and worse.”

For nearly 20 years, Janice had rarely been able to eat or drink in public. Eventually, it became almost impossible to do her



Samer Kanaan, MD

job as a salesperson for a Napa winery. She wasn't even able to taste or enjoy the delicious Napa products she sold.

Finally, in April 2009, Janice reached the point that she was unable to eat or drink anything for nine days. She became severely dehydrated, lost weight, and rapidly grew weaker and weaker. When

she was admitted to Queen of the Valley, she was severely anemic. Her acute condition was treated and a battery of focused tests was conducted. That's when she was referred to thoracic surgeon Samer Kanaan, MD, who is trained and experienced in treating Achalasia patients using robotically assisted surgical techniques.

“Achalasia literally means ‘failure to relax,’” Dr. Kanaan explains. “It arises when the nerve messages that control the esophagus are interrupted and it becomes impossible to swallow. The ultimate cause of the condition is unknown, but autoimmune disease or hidden infections are suspected.”

There is currently no known cure for Achalasia, but robotically assisted surgery can make it possible for patients to swallow and return to relatively

normal lives. The Queen's robotic technology helps surgeons perform complex procedures, such as those necessary to treat Achalasia, with maximum precision and reduced risk of damage to surrounding nerves and tissues. It sometimes makes it possible to operate successfully on patients too weak to undergo more traditional surgery.

Dr. Kanaan performed Janice's surgery with robotic assistance through four tiny incisions. That meant she could be back on her feet within three days with surprisingly little pain. And she was eating again by next day.

“It was wonderful,” Janice says. “The hospital food tasted great after not being able to eat for so long. In six weeks I was out enjoying life with my friends, and I'm practically living on the golf course these days.”

**For more information** on the broad range of robotically assisted procedures and the many fine physicians trained in robotics who practice at Queen of the Valley Medical Center, visit [robotics.thequeen.org](http://robotics.thequeen.org).

