Addy Murdie is having a mid-pregnancy checkup for her third child at the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre’s Adult Congenital Heart Disease Pregnancy Clinic, a program that runs in partnership with the Mount Sinai Hospital Prenatal Care Program. As Ms. Murdie discusses her health with her physician, Dr. Rachel Walk, the conversation is punctuated with laughter from her healthy son and daughter, and toys being boisterously thrown around the room. “Sometimes it’s a little crazy coming in,” she admits.

Ms. Murdie is a clinic success story. She was born with a coarctation of the aorta, or a narrowing of the main artery that pumps blood from the heart to the rest of the body. She says all her pregnancies have gone smoothly and she credits the clinic for that.

Ms. Murdie’s husband, Nick, notes that although they live in Port Hope, Ont., which is over an hour from the hospital, “It’s worth it for the help we get here. You never know what can happen.”

It’s nearing the end of the day, and Jessica Pereira is at the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre for a checkup. Ms. Pereira is engrossed in a music video by Selena Gomez, her favourite singer. The annual visits are sometimes tedious for Ms. Pereira, so her mother carries a smartphone with her favourite shows and music on it. Ms. Pereira has Down syndrome and an atrioventricular septal defect, or holes in the heart. She attends the Dalghlish Family 21q Clinic, a specialized clinic geared toward patients with special needs. The clinic is about trying to alleviate the anxiety patients feel coming to the hospital or undergoing multiple diagnostic and surgical procedures. Ms. Pereira is due for a pulmonary valve replacement later this year.

Distraction, like watching a favourite television show, often helps ease tensions, but the key is “building a bridge of trust,” says Ms. Pereira’s anesthesiologist, Dr. Jane Higgin.

Anesthesia assistant Joanne Rosche says giving patients some control back, like letting them choose which arm the blood pressure cuff goes on or getting them to hold the anesthetic mask, is also effective. But helping patients become comfortable with the surroundings takes some time and patience.

“I mean, everyone’s a little afraid when they come into hospital,” she says.

For Ms. Pereira’s mother, Maria, it is comforting to know that her daughter is looked after by experts who care. “It’s a very positive feeling when she comes,” she says. “If I know she’s comfortable, then I know they’re treating her [well] and they’re looking after her the best they can.”

A& Dr. Barry Rubin about the future of the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre, and it quickly becomes clear he has big plans. As the institution’s visionary Medical Director and Chair, Dr. Rubin is dedicated to helping the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre become the world’s leading cardiovascular centres in all aspects, from patient care to technology to research.

But spend a few minutes speaking with Dr. Rubin about his unceasing drive toward excellence, and it also becomes clear where he gets his vision. The answer is simple, says Dr. Rubin – from Peter Munk.

He speaks with fond reflection about the man he considers one of his most important mentors.

“I realize how integrated Peter’s thinking has become in the way we run the heart centre,” Dr. Rubin says. “Peter was phenomenal at identifying elements of proposals that resonated with him. He could see the long-term value in particular things.”

One time, for example, Dr. Rubin says he was explaining how sensors can be used to probe deep into arteries – a concept that immediately intrigued the mining titan.

“Peter was fascinated. He said, ‘That’s exactly the kind of technology we’re using to go deep into our mines.’ He made the connection instantly and he understood how you can apply a technology or an idea to look at a completely different issue,” Dr. Rubin says.

In both his broader thinking about heart disease and his day-to-day work running the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre, Dr. Rubin says he thinks constantly of the legacy of his mentor. He and his colleagues have organized the centre in all aspects, from patient care to technology to research, to honor the promise we made to him on how we would improve the lives of patients with cardiovascular disease, attracting the best in line with a vascular surgeon who’s made striving to be the best a priority throughout his career.

Meet Dr. Barry Rubin, Medical Director at the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre. He’s a celebrated vascular surgeon, a champion of innovation and a visionary leader dedicated to honouring the legacy of his mentor, Peter Munk.

As the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre’s top administrator and leading visionary, Dr. Rubin is determined to see Mr. Munk’s vision come to fruition. And while world-leading excellence might seem like a lofty goal, it’s an ambition in line with a vascular surgeon who’s made striving to be the best a priority throughout his career.
Dr. Rubin resuscitated two patients in the same night at Mount Sinai Hospital with one of his mentors, the late Dr. Robert Ginsberg. A thoracic surgeon, Dr. Ginsberg was surprised at the hospital when he learned that Dr. Rubin, who had been one of his students, had done so. "It was hard to get into surgery in Toronto," Dr. Ginsberg said of his mentor, who was later named the first Chief Surgeon at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. "He didn't necessarily think it would be the easiest to get into surgery in Toronto."

"I'm so glad that Barry Rubin is leading the [Peter Munk Cardiac Centre]," says Dr. Victor Dzau, a cardiologist and president of the U.S. National Academy of Medicine. Dr. Dzau is also chair of the Ontario Medical Association panel that negotiates doctors' fees with the Ontario government.

"He's so dedicated," Dr. Reznick says of his long-time friend. Dr. Reznick says he appreciates that he never has to wonder if it's a good time to call Dr. Rubin or not when there's a work problem to discuss.

"We talk more often on Saturday evenings than we do on a Monday afternoon," Dr. Reznick says. "What strikes me most is how much time he has to work on what he wants to work on, and how much time he has to work for his patients."

"He's so dedicated," Dr. Reznick adds. "If he were not a vascular surgeon, I think he would have made a great criminal lawyer."

Dr. Barry Rubin (left) with patient Penny. Ms. Ungerman says what she appreciates most about Dr. Rubin is how passionate he is on putting the patient's care before everything else. "I hope it will be that I gave every single ounce that was available to the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre to make it the best cardiac centre possible; that I left no stone unturned and paid attention to every single detail that it could possibly be; that I left no ounce that was available to the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre."

"Barry] knows the facts and cuts to the chase. If he were not a vascular surgeon, I think he would have made a great criminal lawyer."