Robert Michler, M.D., ’81: Captain of the ship
By Jennifer Durgin

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r. Robert Michler's headlamp keeps slipping down out of place. It may seem a tiny matter in this high-tech operating room, but the light needs to be at exactly the right angle to illuminate the area of the heart he's operating on. Each time the lamp shifts, he carefully readjusts it again with a surgical tool he keeps nearby just for that purpose.

So when the cardiothoracic surgical fellow assists him through several blockages in the heart's little heart and aorta, he and the surgical fellow will perform a quadruple bypass surgery for a patient with four arteries (a condition that reduces the flow of blood to the heart muscle from the interior of the patient's aorta."

The patient, a man in his mid-sixties, has multi-vascular coronary artery disease (a condition that reduces the flow of blood to the heart muscle), a thickening of the heart wall (a condition called hypertrophic obstructive cardiomyopathy), and a number of other cardiac issues that put his heart itself at risk. Michler cuts away excess muscle tissue from inside the man's heart and aorta, and he and the surgical fellow will perform a quadruple bypass surgery for a patient who has had a number of other surgeries in the past. They then use a vein taken from the right femoral artery to create four alternate routes for blood to bypass the closed portions of the coronary arteries and flow into the heart's tissue.

It's a complex but not unusual procedure for Michler, who is chair of cardiothoracic surgery at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx.

"There is nothing in the field of heart disease and heart surgery that I haven't seen or dealt with," he states matter-of-factly. "That is a wonderful place to be in your career. There is nothing that I can see today that would surprise me or throw me for a loop. That's great for patients. And great for my team, because they learn."