



Local woman praises Level One Cardiac Partnership

(May 2007) Betty Marsh, 63, remembers her first heart attack.

"The first was two years ago and it felt like indigestion in the front of the chest. I didn't recognize it as a heart attack at first."

Ex-husband Larry Marsh knew something was wrong and drove Betty from rural Harrington, Washington to an emergency room at a major hospital in Spokane, one hour away.

Once Betty arrived in Spokane, the long process of diagnosis began.

"I spent probably 10 minutes in the ER waiting room — they took me right back. But it was a long time — hours before they found out I was having a heart attack and a couple of hours for the heart cath team to get together to do the procedure."

In the spring of 2007, Betty felt similar symptoms. This time, Larry called for an ambulance and Betty was driven the 15 miles to Lincoln Hospital in Davenport where the Level One Cardiac Care Partnership between Lincoln and Sacred Heart Medical Center had just been put into place.

"When Dr. Panke told me this was part of the Level One program, I got excited. I'd heard about it from my cardiologist Dr. Stifter and knew it was going to be a lifesaver," says Larry, noting that the speed of diagnosis and interventional treatment was much faster than during Betty's first heart attack.

That's because even before Betty entered the building, Lincoln Hospital's Cardiac Team was preparing the ER. The goal? Aspirin therapy and a diagnostic EKG within 10 minutes of arrival.

When the EKG suggested a blockage, Dr. Panke picked up the phone to continue the chain of lifesaving events.

First, Sacred Heart's Cardiac Catheter team was called into action. Then, Betty was immediately airlifted by MedStar Critical Care Transport Service to Sacred Heart. She was taken directly to the cath lab where the team was waiting. No paperwork. No red tape.

"She went over the top of me in the helicopter as I was leaving Davenport," says Larry, still marveling at the speed at which all was accomplished. "Dr. Panke told me I couldn't get to Sacred Heart before she was done in the cath lab. When I did get there, I called the cath lab and talked to the doctor who did the procedure. He said it was done and she'd come through it just fine."

The time from door to door? Ninety-three minutes from Betty's arrival at Lincoln Hospital to having her artery opened and a stent inserted. The protocol worked.

"This quality program is making an immense difference to cardiac patients," says Michael Ring, MD, medical director of Sacred Heart's cardiac services. "It allows us to deliver the most effective care to heart attack victims throughout our region, not just those who show up in our ER."

Larry agrees.

"This program is going to save lives, no question about it," says Larry. "They told me her heart damage was very minimal and we all know it's because they got in there sooner and opened it up and made things work again."

The partnership was a success and Betty sings the praises of both her hometown hospital and the metropolitan medical center responsible for such an innovative, lifesaving program.

"I like Sacred Heart! They're very good," she says of the care she received from the cardiac team. "I could always find a doctor to talk to if I had questions or concerns. They were great."

And, the Marsh's both learned a very valuable lesson.

"From now on, we're going to call an ambulance and stop at Lincoln Hospital first to get stabilized," vows Betty. "Then, if it is a heart attack, they know what's going on and they can communicate with the cardiologists at Sacred Heart so the cath lab team will know what to expect when we get there."

To find out more about the Level One Cardiac Care Program, log on to www.lincolnhospital.org or call (509) 725-7101 ext. 139 for an informational brochure.