

The Rest of the Story: After Surgery

Before you are out of surgery, preparations are underway for your care in Sparrow's Cardiac Care Unit (CCU). Registered nurses Nancy Simpson and Debbie Moran have been caring for heart patients at Sparrow for 26 and 18 years, respectively:

Nancy Simpson, R.N.: We provide a smooth transition from surgery to the progressive care unit [but] the patient's first four hours here can be quite demanding.

Debbie Moran, R.N.: We usually know the equipment we want in the room ahead of time and make sure it's set up. We double up with a really good team effort to get these patients in here – nurses, respiratory, pharmacy. It just goes smoothly. We have a lot of extra equipment and medications in case they're needed, but in 24 hours most of that is gone.

NS: The average stay is one or two days. With all the monitoring equipment, the tube into their lungs and hooked up to a ventilator, all the IV lines and basal drips, chest tubes, catheters... it can be pretty intimidating for the family. But as Debbie says, they progress quite rapidly and we discontinue many of those things.

DM: The families are really super. They have a lot of trust in you.

NS: The family is absolutely part of the care. The staff does a very good job of explaining and teaching. Pre-op teaching has gone on, but it's not the same as actually seeing it hooked up to your loved one. So we do a lot of teaching, explaining, reinforcing. We provide reassurance and information, and it's because they feel confident in the staff and reassured the patient is in good hands that they can go home at night and get the rest they need.

DM: Many of these families make us a part of their lives. A lot of these patients may not be here a long time, but they appreciate what we do. They come back and visit. So we may not be able to build a big relationship with them before they get out of here, but they do remember.

NS: Once they leave the CCU they go to the progressive care unit, a designated cardiac floor for both medical and surgical patients. It's a "step-down" unit, a kind of intermediate level of care between the CCU and the regular med-surg floor.

The quality and commitment of staff that work here... It's such a team effort, from the surgeon, anesthesiologist, the perfusionist, nurses, respiratory therapist, patient support services like clergy, pharmacy, food and nutrition – all the different disciplines involved in the care of these patients.

We also have a clinical practice team that looks at different aspects of the program and how to make it better. How we can improve our process, provide higher-quality patient care, produce better outcomes in the future.

The people who do this really, really enjoy it. They really like what they're doing.

No Kidding: Young Men at Risk

According to a recent study published in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*, about one in five American men ages 30-34 has an advanced case of clogged arteries, putting him at risk of a heart attack within 10-15 years. They also have no symptoms.

The good news, the study shows, is that simple lifestyle changes (low-fat diet, exercise) can help lower the risk of heart disease. What's more, young women do not appear to be similarly affected by early build-up of plaque in their arteries.

Women Really Are Different

According to the American Heart Association, one in ten American woman 45-64 years of age has some form of heart disease, increasing to one in four after age 65. In fact, heart disease is the number one killer of American women, killing more than stroke, lung cancer and breast cancer combined.

Why? For one thing, women experience many heart attack symptoms that differ from the more well-known symptoms that men experience, and therefore fail to recognize them. Women are more likely to feel nauseated, exhausted or breathless. Pain is subtler and more apt to appear in the abdomen, back or jaw rather than the chest.

Women are also more likely to ignore their pain, or take care of business (like cleaning the house!) before seeing a doctor. Delaying treatment may be one of the reasons women are more likely than men to die after a heart attack.

So follow a healthy lifestyle and learn the signs of heart attack in women as well as men. And, for goodness sake, get to an emergency room as soon as you suspect something is wrong.

Warning Signs and Signals of Heart Attack

Your body will likely send one or more of these warning signals of a heart attack:

- Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest lasting more than a few minutes.
- Pain spreading to the shoulders, neck or arms.
- Chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.
- In women: abdominal pain, exhaustion after exercise

Not all of these signs occur in every attack. Sometimes they go away and return. If some occur, get help fast. If you notice one or more of these signs, don't wait. Call 9-1-1 and get to Sparrow or your nearest hospital right away!