



By Meta McMillian

David Leff remembers thinking that this could not be happening to him. After all, he is a police officer, accustomed to the rigors of law enforcement on the streets. He also is relatively young and a self-described “physical fitness nut.” And yet, the pain shooting through his forearms and the feeling of pressure on his chest that day were undeniable.

Think **FAST**

Quick action and therapy at Sagamore Hills Medical Center help a local police sergeant survive a heart attack

Leff, 45 at the time, was experiencing the classic symptoms of a heart attack. "I didn't want to believe it was happening to me," he recalls. But he did not have a long time to dwell on the improbable. His life was at stake. He needed medical attention fast.

He got it from the emergency team at Sagamore Hills Medical Center, a subsidiary of South Pointe Hospital. Leff, of nearby Macedonia, credits the rapid and organized action of the team at the Summit County facility with saving his life. And he credits cardiac rehabilitation therapy at that same facility with helping him resume his duties as a sergeant with the University Circle police force.

"We are a small operation, but we are mighty," says Jeanne Cashion, R.N., an emergency nurse, who attended to Leff. "Because we do not have the volume of a large hospital, we get things done more quickly."

● Moving Quickly

Such quick action proved crucial for Leff, and so did being in good shape at 5'10" and 205 pounds. In fact that is why the pains, discomfort and sweatiness he experienced in March 2004, while hanging pictures in his home, made the heart attack such a shock. "I knew what was happening," recalls Leff, who coincidentally is an American Heart Association CPR instructor. "All I could say was, 'Oh, my goodness.' You don't want to believe that something like this can happen to you."

He was in such disbelief that his mother-in-law, Edith Friedland, had to force him to seek emergency care. Leff drove the two of them to the Sagamore Hills Medical Center, which has provided 24-hour, full-service emergency care for more than 27 years. He told them of his chest pains. The emergency physician and

nurses took quick action. Anyone complaining of heart symptoms is given a cardiac workup, which includes an electrocardiogram (EKG) to display heart activity, and blood work and a detailed medical history, Cashion says. She remembers the day Leff came into the emergency department. The center was busy with patients, but Leff received immediate attention.

The EKG confirmed a heart attack in progress. Leff was given thrombolytic medication to begin breaking clots in his coronary arteries and a blood thinner to maintain a steady flow. As this fast action was taking place, the emergency staff was trying to ease Leff's fears by gently joking with him.

"If it had not been for the nurses and doctor at Sagamore Hills it

David Leff started cardiac rehabilitation a week after he returned home from the hospital.



Who Needs Cardiac Rehabilitation?

According to the American Heart Association, patients who experienced a heart attack or underwent cardiac procedures are the ones who need cardiac rehabilitation. In fact, for those who participated in cardiac rehab, AHA research shows there were fewer heart attacks, cardiac-related problems and deaths.

"Cardiac rehab is so much more than just exercise," says Marcia Rais, R.N., cardiac rehabilitation nurse at South Pointe Hospital. "We monitor patients' progress, including blood pressure and pulse. We provide education on reducing modifiable risk factors, nutrition, smoking cessation, stress relief and medications."

The certified program at Sagamore Hills Medical Center provides the education and tools needed for cardiac patients to recover from a heart attack. For more information, visit our Web site at www.southpointehospital.org.

would have been a lot worse for me," Leff says. "I was watching the whole time. I could see what everybody was doing. They were fast and organized."

● Why Speed Matters

Timing is crucial in treating heart attack victims, says Philip Howren, D.O., who attended to Leff. "If you

can get medical treatment to the patient early enough, you can stop or even reverse damage to the heart," he says. Everything that needed to happen in his favor for treatment happened.

As it turns out, Leff was at the Sagamore Hills center for only about 45 minutes. During that time, he



Heart Attack Symptoms

Knowing the symptoms of a heart attack can help you or someone you care about get the quick attention needed.

These symptoms include:

- ◆ discomfort or possibly pain in the chest or other upper regions of the body, such as the arms, neck, jaw or stomach
- ◆ shortness of breath
- ◆ nausea
- ◆ sweating
- ◆ lightheadedness

Call 911 if a person is experiencing these symptoms.

If emergency medical services cannot be accessed, drive the victim to the nearest emergency department. The victim should refrain from driving; his or her condition could worsen, and an accident could result.

David Leff was diligent about his therapy, working very hard to get back in shape.

received medical intervention, a cardiologist was contacted for a catheterization and a helicopter came to take Leff to the hospital. The catheterization revealed a blocked artery on the right side of his heart. An angioplasty was performed. During the procedure, his artery was expanded, and a stent, a coiled metal tube, was inserted. The stent will keep the artery open for normal blood flow.

Leff says he had some anxious moments throughout the ordeal. “There was a lot of anxiety, because I was thinking that I was too young to have this problem. You have fears about death because you realize what could happen.”

There was reason for concern. Coronary heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death in this country, according to the American Heart Association. Risk factors for heart disease include stress, heredity, age and gender. Men are at greater risk, and get heart attacks sooner than women. Lifestyle risk factors include tobacco smoke, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity, diabetes, stress and too much alcohol. It turned out that Leff had a history of heart disease in his family.

● Next Steps

Leff was out of the hospital in two days. In another week—a week sooner than most cardiac patients—he was starting therapy in the cardiac rehabilitation program at Sagamore Hills Medical Center. He learned about the personalized cardiac therapy program while visiting the emergency staff to thank them.

In the three-month program, Leff attended sessions three days a week for an hour each day. The workout consisted of an exercise regimen that

utilized a bicycle, treadmill and weights. Cardiac rehab is not just an exercise program. It also includes lectures on diet, stress management, lipid and blood sugar control, the role of medications and smoking cessation. South Pointe Hospital’s cardiac rehabilitation program is certified by the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation for having met strict standards required by the association.

Marcia Rais, R.N., says the staff also is alert to any signs of depression in patients, so they can get appropriate treatment. But she adds that patients are a source of encouragement for each other. During the program, patients also learn about heart disease and lifestyle changes to prevent future problems with it. Patients’ vital signs are monitored, and staff serves as a liaison between patients and their physicians to ensure proper treatment and therapy.

Therapists were impressed with Leff because of his determination to overcome his heart disease. “He was very diligent about his therapy,” Rais says. “He was willing to do whatever it took to get back in shape.”

After leaving rehabilitation, patients are encouraged to maintain an exercise routine and adopt good nutritional habits for overall good health. Leff has resumed his running and weight-lifting regimen. He takes medication to keep his cholesterol and blood pressure in check, and has given up his occasional cigars altogether. His wife, Kate, already mindful of good nutrition, says the two are even more mindful of limiting or eliminating snacks and high-fat foods.

“I am back on the streets, helping out with arrests and other administrative duties,” Leff says. “I see myself as being completely back to where I was before. In fact, I may be stronger.” ■