

JCL's Miracles: Widow Maker Foiled

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They call the kind of heart attack that hit New River resident Keith Webb a widow maker. "That's because it's an extremely large heart attack," said cardiologist Tri Nguyen, MD, director of Noninvasive Cardiology at John C. Lincoln Deer Valley Hospital.



Keith Webb, left, with his cardiologist, Tri Nguyen, MD, director of Noninvasive Cardiology at John C. Lincoln Deer Valley Hospital.

"The left anterior descending artery is a large blood vessel that goes down the front of the heart," Dr. Nguyen explained. "Keith's was 100 percent occluded. A piece of plaque ruptured, ripped off the blood vessel wall and created a thrombus, a kind of blood clot. The clot blockage completely shut down blood flow.

"Most people with this condition die," Dr. Nguyen said.

But Webb is alive because he got care very quickly. "A lot of speed by everyone involved made the difference," Dr. Nguyen said. "The moral of this story is that if you want to survive and recover, you must take heart attack symptoms seriously and don't wait to seek help."

Heart experts like to say that "time equals muscle." When blood flow stops, heart muscle starts to die. The faster blood flow can be restored, the less damage is done and the more complete recovery is possible. That's why the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association established a 90-minute standard for hospitals to re-establish blood flow after heart attack patients reach the Emergency Department. If it takes much longer than that, complete recovery is less likely.

Webb's blood flow was restored 19 minutes after Daisy Mountain Fire Department paramedics whisked him through the door of the Deer Valley Emergency Department.

In casual conversation, there's not much difference in sound between "nineteen" and "ninety." But for a heart attack patient, the 71-minute difference is as huge as Webb's widow maker. The irony is that Webb was not at high risk for a heart attack. He has a healthy lifestyle, exercises regularly, eats a lot of fruits and vegetables and takes medicine to control his cholesterol. He should have been fine. But while playing tennis last summer with a friend, Webb suddenly and uncharacteristically felt tired. He took a break, got some water and decided he just needed to quit for the day. The courts are only a couple of blocks from his home, so he walked toward his house. Halfway home, he began to experience chest pain and by the time he got home, he was definitely uncomfortable.

"It started in the back of my neck, went into my left arm and into my chest," he said. "I tried sitting down and lying down, and neither seemed to help. So I called 911." Webb's wife, Casey, was amazed: "The fire department arrived in less than three minutes. They knew right away what was wrong with Keith. The paramedics gave him spray nitroglycerin and baby aspirin, and they whisked him away in the ambulance to the hospital."

Because Daisy Mountain Fire Department's emergency vehicles are all equipped with wireless EKG machines, they were able to transmit Webb's coronary information to the Deer Valley Hospital Emergency Department, where physicians determined he was definitely having a heart attack. That eliminated time that would otherwise be necessary to run those tests in the Emergency Department.

"I couldn't believe it," Casey Webb said. "When we got to the hospital, the medical team was standing there waiting for us, and they raced Keith to surgery."

They took him to the cath lab, where Dr. Nguyen and the cath lab team implanted three stents to open Webb's artery and restore blood flow through the heart.

The 19 minutes that elapsed between Webb's arrival and restoration of coronary blood flow is the current hospital record. "We have such a great cath lab team, and the procedure went very smoothly," Dr. Nguyen recalled. Once the procedure was complete, "I felt better almost immediately," said Webb, who only spent one night in the hospital before he was ready to return home. "Even though the heart attack was pretty severe, there was no damage to my heart."

By Oct. 1, Webb was back at work at the Anthem WalMart, where he is a merchant supervisor. "I absolutely feel good now," Webb said.

"Not only am I back at work, but I'm active again, getting out, going to the gym to lift weights and walking our dogs."

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