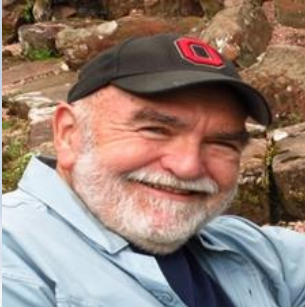


INSPIRING HOPE

Jim Kelly - "I joined Mended Hearts to learn as much as possible about heart disease."

In July, 2014 at age 70, my resting pulse dropped below 30 beats per minute. On top of this, my electrocardiogram was showing that I was in AFib, meaning that the upper heart chambers were not pumping correctly and not sending the proper electrical signals to the lower chambers. Heart issues were a trivial factor in my family compared to cancer. I had always been overweight, and my blood pressure was too high. My activity level included daily workouts and my diet was high in heart healthy foods. Serious health concern was a foreign concept.



That July, however, symptoms of fatigue, shortness of breath and weakness were starting to scare me. The first thing Dr. Daoud at the Ross Heart Hospital did was to insert a pacemaker just below my collar bone. Now a routine procedure, it was too new a generation ago to have much impact. Undoubtedly many of my ancestors died prematurely of undiagnosed heart arrhythmia, just as my younger brother did recently. A sister is also on a pacemaker. Sibling onsets have obviously raised a big red flag, so our family is now focusing more on heart disease than before.

The pacemaker improved my quality of life, but the AFib persisted. Multiple cardioversions intended to restore normal heart rhythm have been unsuccessful for me. A sleep study was also in the cards, because heart problems like mine are frequently linked to sleep apnea. I found that hard to accept at the time, but the resulting diagnosis of centralized sleep apnea from Dr. Das required a bi-pap machine to keep me breathing throughout the night. The immediate improvement in the length and quality of my sleep made me a strong believer and advocate of sleep medicine. There were also a few heart-artery problems that would soon be addressed. Blockage became a big factor with the onset of chest pain while swimming. Dr. Marrar sent me to the ER and from there to the cath lab where an angiogram indicated I had a 70% narrowing of an artery, which could be corrected with a stent.

Still not out of the woods, my heart started beating out of sync. This resulted in an EF or ejection fraction of only 30%, or half of normal. Dr. Daoud intervened with a biventricular pacer that used a third lead to the left ventricle. Only about 30% of pacemaker patients need this device. So, by January, 2015 feeling like the bionic man, I was functioning normally again, and chomping at the bit to return to my workout and training regimen. For the last nine months, my checkups and follow-ups have thankfully all been the healthiest of my entire 71 years.

I am fully dependent on my pacer since my AFib prevents normal electrical signaling within my heart. My EP doctor assures me the AFib is not a problem, even though permanent and the stroke risk while on the blood thinner Xarelto is no greater than normal. The only time I notice the AFib is when the stress level builds.

Now, every day finds me engaged with yoga, biking, weight machines, elliptical or swimming. A couple of times a month, I drive as far as 400 miles to compete in sports. I am also quite strict about staying on a heart-healthy diet. Before my heart event, I had no experience in dealing with heart issues, and joined Mended Hearts to learn as much as possible about beating heart disease. I am now an accredited heart patient visitor for Mended Hearts at the Ross Heart Hospital and University Hospital East and spend 4-8 hours per week telling my story and listening to heart patients. I really look forward to visiting and enjoy helping others deal with their heart challenges.

If you've had a similar experience, or would just like to talk to Jim about living with heart disease, his contact information is listed below!

Mended Hearts of Central Ohio

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It is great to be alive – and to help others