

PATIENT: Joanne Polonchek

Age 80, Meredith, NH

FAMILY: 3 grown children and husband

SURGERY: Bypass and mitral valve repair, January 2, 2009

Once a young nurse herself and with 79 years of good health marked by sound cholesterol and blood pressure readings, Joanne Polonchek had plenty of things to think about a few days before Christmas other than her heart. She was readying her house for the holidays and preparing a New Year's birthday celebration for her husband. She was also anticipating her family's Christmas visit.

But she wasn't planning for the heart attack she suffered during the night the day before Christmas 2008.

"When I woke up at 3:30 in the morning and went to the bathroom," Joanne remembers, "I realized I was breathing heavily, but I just thought my asthma was acting up." Joanne also felt strong pressure in her chest and found she was more comfortable sitting up than lying down. "So, I sat up and read for about an hour and a half, and then I went back to sleep."

Joanne's daughter took her to a local clinic in the morning, where blood work indicated she had, indeed, experienced a heart attack. She went directly to the Emergency Department at Lakes Region General Hospital (LRGH) and met cardiologist Dr. Alan Rosenfeld, of Concord Hospital Cardiac Associates. Concord Hospital currently has three cardiologists based in the Lakes Region who are dedicated to treating people who live in the area and provide services at LRGH. Additionally, Concord Hospital provides the staffing for the Diagnostic Catheterization Lab at Lakes Region General Hospital.

Joanne remembers how strange it was that she didn't have any pain or any of the tingling often associated with heart attacks. She made the best of an unplanned situation at Lakes Region and remembers, "They kept me in the hospital for Christmas. My daughters brought over all the presents and we had a fine time."

Early the following morning Joanne was sent to Concord Hospital's Cardiac Catheterization Suite, where more tests confirmed the need for bypass surgery and valve repair. Joanne was admitted to Concord Hospital under the care of Dr. Gerald Sardella. She was convinced she was in good hands, recalling how "Dr. Sardella assured me that I could handle surgery, even though I was almost 80 years old — and I did." Dr. Sardella successfully performed the surgery on January 2, 2009. "He was great," Joanne recounts, "He would stop in often to see how I was doing and made sure I didn't have any pain. He was wonderful."

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Her daughters routinely visited her at Concord Hospital expressing great satisfaction with her care, according to Joanne, “They were very pleased with what was going on and they were kept completely in the loop on everything involved in my treatment and care.” Joanne’s family also noticed that Concord Hospital’s patient care goes well beyond excellence in medical treatment and rehabilitation. “The food there was fantastic,” Joanne added, “It was the best hospital food I ever tasted—just like a fine hotel.”

Joanne knows that the choices she easily could have made that December night may have been disastrous. “For me, having a heart attack was nothing like I was led to believe. If I thought nothing would be open the next day, I probably wouldn’t have gone to the clinic. I may have waited until my symptoms returned. And who knows what might have happened?”

Because Joanne is the primary caregiver for her husband at home, she needed to spend the next month in a rehabilitation program recovering and allowing others to care for her. Now, back home and taking care of her husband, Joanne only needs to see Dr. Rosenfeld once every six months. “I am so pleased with everything and everybody at Concord Hospital. It was a great place to be.”

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