

# Wellness Visit Gets to the Heart of the Matter

“As far as your body goes, you only get one, so take care of it.” This is the advice Peter “Theo” Leithmann said he wants to share with his neighbors, friends and everyone else in the community. Based on his recent experience, the Milton resident also underscored the importance of having your annual physical or wellness visit if you want to successfully follow his advice.

It had been just over two years since Leithmann’s last annual wellness visit when he arrived for his appointment at Bayhealth Primary Care, Airport Road earlier this year. Although he was feeling fine that day, his nurse, Erica Swartzentruber, LPN, noticed his heart rate was a little high while she was taking his vital signs.

“Since he had just walked into the office, I let him sit for a minute,” recalled Swartzentruber. “Then I took his heart rate again manually and noticed it felt a little irregular, along with it still being high. After consulting with one of the doctors, we performed an EKG. The result indicated that he had atrial fibrillation. Dr. Siu then evaluated Mr. Leithmann and got him started on a blood thinner.”

Atrial fibrillation, also called AFib, is when the heart doesn’t beat properly. If it’s not treated, AFib can eventually lead to a blood clot, stroke or other more serious heart condition.

In addition to the blood thinner, Leithmann said Cindy Siu, MD, also prescribed dietary changes to help him get his AFib under control. “The machines and other technology along with the role of nurses these days have changed the entire way healthcare is delivered, and I think it’s the best, most efficient way, and the magic word is teamwork. Thanks to Dr. Siu and the nurses, I’m getting back on the right track.”

As for Swartzentruber, she’s glad they had called Leithmann and got him scheduled for his annual wellness visit since he might not have found out about his AFib without it. Specifically for people with Medicare, annual wellness visits involve an examination (but not a full-body physical) by a primary care nurse. The nurse then works with the patient’s doctor to create or update a personalized plan for preventing illness based on the patient’s individual risk factors and current state of health. In some cases, like this one, the annual wellness visit can catch a health problem.

“My entire situation came about partly because I ignored getting my yearly exam,” said Leithmann. “I’d like to help others avoid going down this same path, and that’s why I wanted to share my story.”

When asked what else he would say to others about the importance of annual physicals and wellness visits, Leithmann shared these final words of encouragement. “Sometimes we’re so busy in our daily routine we don’t take time to slow down and take stock of our situation, and tomorrow could be a totally different day and situation. Annual physicals and wellness visits are like getting your car serviced. You need to take time for them.”

If you don’t have a primary care provider, visit [Bayhealth.org/Find-A-Doctor](https://www.bayhealth.org/Find-A-Doctor) or call our referral line at [1-866-BAY-DOCS \(229-3627\)](tel:1-866-BAY-DOCS) to find one near you.