



Local Heart Attack Survivor Encourages Others to Learn More About Symptoms & Adopts Life-long Exercise Plan with Help from Cardiac Rehabilitation Program

BY JENNIFER JAMACK

According to The American Heart Association, a loved one dies from cardiovascular disease every 38 seconds. To help combat this, Flagler Hospital joins with the rest of the country every February to raise awareness about heart disease and how people can prevent it. This year, Flagler opened its new electrophysiology lab to deliver the latest and most advanced treatments for all types of cardiac arrhythmias. The hospital also participated in Go Red for Women day and is working to spread awareness that heart disease is the #1 killer of women, especially if it remains untreated.

Recently, we had the honor of speaking to Joanne Zunino, age 57, a graduate of Flagler's Cardiac Rehab program. Joanne wanted to share her story in hopes that more people would pay attention to any signs and symptoms that are out of the norm for their body, and seek medical help before it is too late.

For several weeks before her heart attack, Joanne was feeling overwhelmingly tired, even sleeping 26 hours straight at one point. She continued to experience frequent fatigue and shortness of breath throughout the day. Rather than seeing

a doctor, Zunino scoured the internet for answers, hoping to find clarity for what she thought might be a bigger problem.

"I think I knew something was wrong on the inside, but was afraid to admit to myself that it was something this serious," she shares.

Then, one day while doing her weekly grocery shopping with her best friend Louisa and her husband Mario, Joanne suddenly felt extreme shortness of breath and her chest felt incredibly tight, almost as if it was pulling apart. Joanne told her husband to call 911 and she was transported to Flagler Hospital immediately. At the ER, Joanne was told she was experiencing 100% blockage in the left anterior descending artery and needed an angioplasty with two stents. The heart team acted quickly and saved her life.

After surgery and a short stay in the hospital, Joanne had a three-month follow-up visit with her doctor, and another six month visit to ensure she was healing properly. With her health back on track, Joanne was referred to Flagler's cardiac rehabilitation program.

The cardiac rehabilitation program is a medically-monitored

program held three times per week for one-hour sessions. The goal is to educate and train patients for a lifetime of independent exercise. Joanne began attending the program last March and describes it as an easy way to learn how to exercise while being monitored and a secure method of doing activity after experiencing a medical hardship.

The program allows patients to experience phases of exercise gradually such as: aerobic exercise, free weights/machines, and then ultimately leading to self-exercise. Joanne spoke about the positive social aspects of the program as well, noting how nice it was to have other people to compare notes with and talk about her heart condition and progress. It made her feel like others understood how it felt to go through similar situations and she could make new friendships based off this life-altering event.

After graduating from the cardiac rehab program, Joanne voluntarily joined the maintenance wellness program (Phase 3) where she could exercise on her own but with staff supervision. "It gives me great comfort to know there are trained clinicians on site in case of an emergency," she shared.

Research has shown that patients who successfully complete a cardiac rehabilitation program significantly decrease their hospitalizations and ER visits, while having fewer symptoms and future episodes. For more information about the cardiac rehabilitation program please call 904-819-4338 or visit www.flaglerhospital.org.

