

Heart Transplant Patient Expresses Gratitude for Heartfelt Care at Hahnemann

For eight weeks in spring 2008, Mark Meade waited for a heart transplant in a room on the 21st floor of Hahnemann. What could have been a lonely, frightening time for him and his wife, Terry, was made brighter by the extraordinary care and support they received from Chief of Cardiology Howard Eisen, M.D., and his team, from the nursing staff and from virtually every Hahnemann staff member with whom the Meades came in contact.

“From the day Mark moved into the ‘penthouse’ as we called it, we were totally amazed at the way we were enveloped by everyone at Hahnemann,” says Mrs. Meade. “The care and concern that was shown to us was far above and beyond anything we ever encountered at any other hospital facility.”

“The nurses were always asking if there was anything they could do for us,” says Meade. “They were so caring all the time. Our children, Cindy, Scott and Bill, and especially our grandchildren, Brandon, Jared and Andrew, were always made comfortable and welcome on their visits with Grandpa.”

“They encouraged me to bring things from home to decorate the room for Mark,” adds Mrs. Meade. “They said, ‘This is your home for awhile. We want to make you as comfortable as we can.’ They also made a big effort to help preserve Mark’s dignity despite the fact that he could not get out of bed or do many things for himself. That really meant a lot.”

As the weeks passed, it seemed that everyone at Hahnemann knew the Meades by name. “I could not walk into the cafeteria without a staff member giving me a hug and asking, ‘How is Mr. Mark?’” says Mrs. Meade. “The ladies making the sandwiches and serving hot food, the chef, the cashiers, every one asked every day. The parking valets came running every morning to greet me when they saw my car. The security guards at the front desk always had a kind word and asked ‘How’s he doing?’ Everyone seemed to

know my husband. It was as though he was a rock star! No one had ever given us this kind of care and concern before. It was truly remarkable.”

Meade’s journey toward a heart transplant first began about two years ago when he came to Hahnemann for a consultation with Dr. Eisen on the recommendation of his cardiologist in Princeton, New Jersey. “Our research told us that Dr. Eisen is one of the top five cardiologists in the world,” says Meade. “It was an easy decision to come to him, and we liked and trusted him immediately.”

When Dr. Eisen first saw Meade in 2006, he was suffering from congestive heart failure but was still too well for a transplant. A year later, Meade’s condition was deteriorating and he returned to Dr. Eisen. Over the next few months of treatment and testing, it became clear that the only suitable course of action was a heart transplant, and he was officially placed on the list on March 13, 2008.

“Dr. Eisen and his team could not have been more wonderful,” says Meade. “All of his interns, residents and fellows knew me and talked to me like a human being rather than a patient. They left no doubt in your mind that they really cared about you and wanted you to get better. Suzanne Kenyon and Theresa Rowe, our transplant coordinators, came every day to encourage us.”

“We have very high expectations of our staff and we demand that our patients get the best possible care,” notes Dr. Eisen, who is also a professor in the Department of Cardiology at Drexel University College of Medicine. “We are proud to have the very best team to handle the many complexities surrounding transplant and heart failure.”

Meade’s eight-week vigil for a heart was long and tedious, but the caring support of the Hahnemann staff never waived. “I don’t know how we would have gotten through that time without them,” says Meade.

Mrs. Meade recalls, “When the nurses saw me leaving the floor looking discouraged, they always stopped to talk to me and offer encouragement. They offered the same support to Mark’s brother, Harvey, and his wife, Terry. They helped me feel confident that Mark would get a heart, despite all the peaks and valleys in the process.”

The nursing staff also encouraged the Meades to set goals for the future to keep up their spirits. One day in April, Mrs. Meade was reading a newspaper and saw a full page advertisement for a Neil Diamond concert to be held in Madison Square Garden in New York in August. Knowing that he was Meade’s favorite musical performer, she tore out the ad and hung it in his hospital room opposite his bed. “Our goal was to get to that concert after he got a new heart,” she says.

Soon word spread among the staff that Meade was a Neil Diamond fan, and his music seemed to be everywhere. “The Cardiac Cath lab staff went out of their way to make a CD of Neil Diamond songs and played it for me whenever I went there for a procedure,” recalls Meade.

By June 2, Meade’s health was seriously deteriorating and a suitable donor heart had not been found. Dr. Eisen and Shelley Hankins, M.D., Medical Director of the Transplant Program, made the difficult decision to implant a mechanical pump into his failing heart on June 4.

Then on June 3 at 5 p.m., Dr. Eisen walked into Meade’s room with the best possible news. Surrounded by his interns, residents and fellows, he announced, “We found you a heart!”

Meade recalls, “There must have been 50 hospital staff in my room and out in the hallway cheering and doing high-fives.”

“The whole house staff and nurses were rooting for him,” says Dr. Eisen. “He is a special, very likeable person.”

Dr. Eisen's team went into action to prepare Meade for the transplant surgery, which was performed by John Entwistle III, M.D., a cardiothoracic and transplant surgeon and assistant professor in the Department of Surgery at Drexel University College of Medicine.

One cardiology fellow, Raguu Dudda, M.D., who had been following Meade throughout his journey, called his wife to bring his camera to the hospital. "I'm going to stay here tonight and scrub in so I can film your surgery and bring video updates to your family in the waiting room," he told Meade.

"Dr. Dudda brought out video clips of the first incision, of Mark's old heart and of his new heart beating in his chest," recalls Mrs. Meade.

"The fact that Dr. Dudda was willing to stay up all night and do that for my family is just incredible," says Meade. "Every member of the team has been exceptionally caring to all of us. Whenever I go back to Hahnemann for appointments and procedures, I am greeted with kisses on my forehead like I'm everyone's grandpa. I have never experienced anything like this anywhere else."

While Meade was recovering from surgery, the 21st floor nursing staff was doing more than attending to his medical needs. Knowing how much he wanted to attend the Neil Diamond concert, they decided to write a letter to Diamond himself to request special seating arrangement for the Meade's. "Due to the limitations of immunosuppressant therapy," they wrote, "he needs to be isolated from the large crowd. If you have any way to make Mark's dream of seeing you in concert come true, we would be so grateful."

Diamond responded to the letter with a personal note and an autographed copy of his new CD in the mail. And rather than going to New York City, with Dr. Eisen's permission, the Meades were able to attend his concert in Philadelphia on August 10. They had

reached the goal that had kept their hope alive during those long weeks of waiting for a heart.

“It was a TRIUMPHANT evening for us and the entire Hahnemann staff who made it possible!” exclaims Meade. “The mere fact that the nurses went out of their way to write that letter means the world to us. It’s just another example of the way they went above and beyond for us every day. There are no words to describe how grateful I am for the care and support we received. Our experience at Hahnemann could not have been better. We feel as though we gained another family there.”