



How do you mend a broken heart? (Part 2)

When it comes to creating a healthy lifestyle specifically for your heart one phrase leaps to mind: “If I knew then what I know now. . .” I mention this as it’s just three months since I wrote about my own triple by-pass surgery. All went well thanks to the expertise of Marin General and I am progressing in my recovery. However, as I have learned more about the nature of heart disease I ask myself, ‘What if it could have been avoided?’



During November and December I actively participated in the Cardio Vascular Associates of Marin rehab program. The fitness specialists at their gym, Kathy and Emily, are wonderful—patient, attentive and conscientious. Now to follow up I am enrolling in the TAM Program created by Vicki Chase, R.N., over eighteen years ago to help patients prevent heart attacks. Vicki brings a wide range of practical medical experience from running cardiac programs in Bay Area hospitals to participating as a board member on the American Heart Association Speakers Bureau.

She explained the difference between the initial program and The Heart Institute’s program: “Cardiac Rehab is primarily an exercise program that is monitored. It is a safe and reliable way to rehabilitate after a cardiac event, particularly open heart surgery. TAM takes it a step further. In TAM, we not only work out, we go in depth into how nutritional healing, stress management and psycho-emotional risk reduction empower the participants to make healthy choices and to integrate this lifestyle into their day to day lives. It is truly about living a full, active and enjoyable life and becoming a well informed partner in your health care.”

She described an early nursing experience in the 1970s of seeing a pacemaker inserted at a Santa Rosa hospital. “This was the first of its kind in Sonoma county and I realize just how far we have progressed in heart care and treatment in the last thirty years.” In 1992 she met Joel Sklar, MD and Mark Wexman, MD, which led her to start the special integrated heart disease reversal program in Marin and the birth of TAM. The six week Total Arteriosclerosis Management program is the core of the Heart Health Institute, serving individuals with or at risk for cardiovascular disease. About 700 people have graduated from the Institute’s TAM program since its inception in 1993.

She also explained, “Most people do very well after bypass, however many think that the bypass ‘fixed’ the problem. It did bypass the blockages that were present however it did *not* stop the disease process. CV disease is a chronic, progressive disease that is either accelerated by CV risk factors or slowed by the attenuation of risk factors. Working within a comprehensive program, like TAM, offers the best chance of decreasing risk and reversing the process of CV disease thus decreasing the chance of future ‘events.’”

had masked or ignored. This new awareness along with management tools will be beneficial to my long term health.”

Another participant, Diane Christian-sen added, “The TAM Program was the perfect blend of caring instruction and scientific information coupled with peer group support. The group was invaluable because it started the process of healing for me. I looked forward each week to opening up during circle time, telling the truth about my lifestyle and learning where I needed guidance.

“Before TAM, I thought being productive meant getting as much accomplished during the day as possible. The end result would leave me exhausted and overworked. The TAM Program showed me the value of stillness and checking in with myself during a busy work day. As a result I now do little one-minute meditations and deep breath breaks to center myself and care for my heart.”

I concluded from these conversations and from others who know the program, the need, in my own case, to continue paying attention to all the factors that



Vicki Chase, R.N., TAM Program Director



Emily instructing on weights



Kenn demonstrates Tai Chi

Heart Health Institute 415.499.1010 website:www.myhhi.org

Participants with whom I have spoken explained how profound the lifestyle changes were after completing the course. San Francisco attorney Don Drummond, said, “The program was a life changing event: first, it heightened my awareness of my disease and provided me with solutions, some of which I already knew about but had not implemented, and others which were new. The latter category included Tai Chi and meditation, two forms of stress relief. The fact is I was unaware of the amount of and source of much of my stress. As I implemented these two new management tools, I actually became acutely aware of sources of stress that I

impact the heart. Healing does not finish with the by-pass operation but rather begins with it. The TAM program lays the foundation for a healthier lifestyle, and group support means that you don’t have to do it alone. Each participant re-enforced the nature of the program’s holistic healing spirit and I understood why the TAM practices were real antidotes to the stress of our everyday hectic lives.

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