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AAMC MAGAZINE, HEALING, HEART + VASCULAR, WOMEN'S HEALTH / FEB 15, 2017

A HEART ATTACK SURVIVAL STORY



On March 14, 2016, Kelly Huber suddenly felt strange. She had spent the day doing yard work when her symptoms hit: sore, tired arms and tight shoulders. "It wasn't a normal hurt. It felt like I'd been hit by a truck," says Kelly, who was just three days away from her 51st birthday. "My arms were exhausted. I could barely move them."

At first, Kelly tried to ignore the symptoms. She went inside and got her 8-year-old twin boys ready for bed.

But she couldn't get rid of the heavy feeling in her arms and shoulders, and began to feel extremely hot. She didn't understand what was happening and became confused and concerned. Kelly's husband insisted they go to AAMC's emergency room near her home in Grasonville, Md. There, tests showed the last thing Kelly expected at her age: She was having a **heart attack**.

Women and Heart Disease

- Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women in the U.S.
- Heart disease causes 1 in 3 women's deaths every year.

Source: The American Heart Association

Heart Attack in the Making

Kelly was no stranger to AAMC. When her twins were born three months early, she was by the boys' side for seven long weeks in AAMC's **Neonatal Intensive Care Unit**, Teddy's Place. Now it was her turn to be the patient.

"The artery to the front of Kelly's heart had a major blockage, which was causing her symptoms," says **Elizabeth Reineck, MD**, interventional cardiologist with AAMC. Dr. Reineck reopened Kelly's artery with a stent.

To Kelly, the heart attack felt like it came out of nowhere. But in reality, it was years in the making. "If you looked at her 10-year risk of heart problems one month before she had her heart attack, it would have been very high," says **Kelley Sullivan, MD**, Kelly's post-operative cardiologist with AAMC.

Kelly had high cholesterol and a family history of heart problems. Her father had triple bypass surgery before age 50, and her mother was diagnosed with severe **heart disease**.

On top of that, in the span of seven years, Kelly gave birth to her boys prematurely, which left one of them blind; lost her mother; and became separated from her husband. "It was a lot to handle," she says.

A New Lease on Life

Kelly's heart attack was the icing on a bitter cake. "I was scared to death. I prayed, 'I have little boys. Please let me make it so I can be here for them,'" she says. Her prayers were answered when she left the hospital three days later on her birthday.

That was just the beginning of Kelly's recovery story. Post-operative care would be a partnership between Kelly and her doctors. "Even if we can open up the blocked artery, you have to take medications for the rest of your life and follow up with a cardiologist regularly," says Dr. Reineck. "As doctors, we can only do so much. To be successful moving forward, patients need to make positive lifestyle changes, too."

Kelly was determined to do whatever it took to succeed. For her, that meant taking prescribed medications, **improving her diet** and **exercising** more often. Because she was terrified of another heart attack, exercising was especially hard. "You worry," she says. "Every little ping and pain feels like it's your heart."


Fortunately, three months of cardiac rehab at AAMC helped her recover physically and emotionally. "Kelly came to us scared and nervous. She was afraid for her kids," says cardiac nurse Shannon Adkins. Her therapy with Kelly included nutritional counseling and supervised exercise, such as walking on a treadmill while connected to a heart monitor. "Our goal was to make her feel better about doing things so that when she went back into the real world, she would feel more confident."

Kelly's twins were by her side at most of her appointments. They supported her a few steps away from where she'd first supported them at their birth.


"My boys are my little advocates. They are my biggest motivation for getting healthy," Kelly says. "I've changed everything so I can be here to watch them grow up."

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Contributors



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