



Heart in the Right Place

Austin doctor is saved from surprise cardiac failure after high-tech coronary test reveals hidden danger

by Rich Smith

93 WORDS

502 CHARACTERS (NO SPACES) & 591 CHARACTERS (WITH SPACES)

Because they are the guardians of good health, everyone assumes doctors never suffer medical problems of their own. Mark McLelland, MD, begs to differ.

Without any symptoms, the trim and athletic Austin neuroradiologist discovered he was on the verge of a catastrophic heart attack.

The shocking find put him in the company of approximately 24 million other Americans formally diagnosed with coronary disease.

But he perhaps would have remained clueless about his condition until too late were it not for a heart exam conducted with state-of-the-art imaging technology right in his very office.

Ounce of Prevention

BODY - 502 WORDS

2566 CHARACTERS (NO SPACES) & 3060 CHARACTERS (WITH SPACES)

McLelland – who is one of about 70 radiologists belonging to Austin Radiological Association, a group started in 1954 and currently providing comprehensive imaging services from 14 Central Texas locations – says his heart previously had given no hint of the extreme danger looming, although he was aware that he might someday face cardiac trouble since it runs in his family.

“My father developed symptoms of heart disease in early middle age,” McLelland says. “Given that heart disease can be hereditary, I’ve always kept a close watch for indications that I was headed for a heart attack. But sometimes, as in my case, the problem can be developing and growing more serious by the day and still not be detected if you’re relying on less revealing types of tests.”

Among the insufficient gauges McLelland had depended on was his cholesterol count. It became a cause for mild concern a few years ago when the numbers rose slightly above safe limits. For that, his personal physician prescribed a cholesterol-lowering medication.

The medication helped, but McLelland’s doctor – a big believer in the old saying of an ounce of prevention equaling a pound of cure – wasn’t satisfied. So he recommended a special type of heart disease test known as a computed tomography (CT) screening angiogram.

One of the few places in Austin where this test was available was McLelland’s office.

“My doctor is not part of Austin Radiological Association, but he knew that my group had recently acquired an advanced-technology 64-slice CT scanner,” says McLelland. “This is a high-speed, high-resolution imaging system capable of providing amazingly detailed pictures of the internal workings of many parts of the body – the heart included – that previously were all but impossible to capture without more invasive and expensive testing.

“It’s because we had installed this new equipment that we’re now capable of providing CT screening angiograms. The imaging procedure is exceptionally good at uncovering arterial blockages before they can trigger a heart attack. It’s much, much better than the screening calcium-scoring method that has been popular for a number of years.”

Of strong appeal to a busy person like McLelland is that a CT screening angiogram can take fewer than ten minutes to perform (McLelland says he was in and out in roughly five).

“It was quick, easy and painless,” he tells.

Near-Total Blockage

Then came the disturbing news. The CT screening angiogram showed that one of McLelland’s two coronary arteries was 95% blocked.

“I was stunned,” he recalls. “I couldn’t believe it. And yet I never felt healthier. I had absolutely no idea the disease had progressed that far.”

It was a revelation all the more alarming because McLelland insists he was seldom one to do the wrong things – he ate right, didn’t smoke, got adequate sleep and exercised plentifully.

In short, he took good care of himself and stayed in shape.

“I’m not a fitness enthusiast on the same scale as a marathon runner, but I do work out pretty aggressively, just as I’ve done ever.