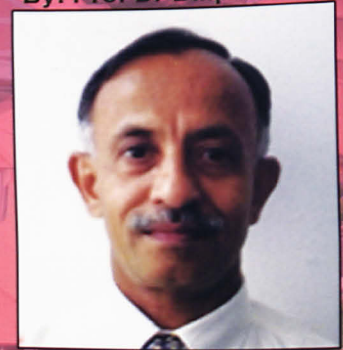


My Saga of Undergoing Coronary Artery Bypass Graft

1st the Heart Attack: My Experience [Part 1]

By: Prof Dr Dilip Murthy



I don't think anyone would believe that I would be a victim of heart attack, that too being a vegetarian and a person conscious of being physically fit. I keep fit going for walks, the gym, and playing outdoor games. I have no medical ailments such as asthma, diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol or obesity. Apart from this I enjoy teaching and carrying out workshops and research in neuroscience. Yet no one knows with heart attacks- everybody is fair game!

In the weeks leading up to my episode, things at our medical school in UMS were really hectic. I was away at Kuala Lumpur for the Physiology Inter-Medical Quiz Competition organized by University Malaya on September 25th 2010. I had taken a team of our medical students to participate in the quiz competition, and on previous weekends I had been training our students for the same (We were placed fourth, which was not bad, as the participants came from 16 different countries and there were 41 medical schools competing). Following this was a seminar on 'Ear Problems' on the 2nd of October and the very next day [3rd of October (Sunday)] we had the Medical Quiz for Our medical students. Here, I was not only a member of the organizing committee but also involved in getting the questions from our lecturers, vetting them, and getting the visual round questions organized. Again, on the day of the Quiz I was the Quiz Master too. Little did I know that soon I would be running around from one hospital to another!

Next day (4th October), was the first Monday of the month and we had our usual monthly assembly, after which I went back to editing my postgraduate student's thesis (draft), in my office. Later, by noon, I went to pick up my gown for the upcoming Convocation at the University Chancellery. Having collected that, I went to UMTP to get my ID card and then went home for lunch. I was fine till this point. I had lunch with my wife. After resting for a few minutes, I got ready to get back to SPU. It was around 1:00 pm. Suddenly, I developed a sharp, discomforting pain in my chest which started to radiate to my jaws and then travel along the side (medial aspect) of my left arm. I also felt a little nauseated. I sat down in discomfort and explained it to my wife who was watching me. She then said we had better go to the hospital to get it checked. At this point we both knew something was not right with my heart. But, I was in self-denial. I did not know where to go, so I called up Dr. Kumaraswamy and asked him if he could come and pick me up as I was not confident to drive in this state. He came and I decided to go to our SPU polyclinic in Kingfisher. We drove to the polyclinic where Dr. Sophie and her staff nurse immediately asked me to lie down on the bed and recorded my blood pressure and took an ECG. My heart rate was high, blood pressure (BP) low and the ECG showed ST-elevation. Dr. Sophie told me that the ECG did not look good and that I should go to QEHL. But, I asked to go to Likas Hospital which was right next door. She had given me a nitroglycerine tablet, but the pain and discomfort did not reduce. We then went to the Emergency at Likas Hospital. At Likas Hospital, there were a few duty doctors who took another ECG, BP and blood sample for analysis. I was there till 6:00 pm. in the evening. Unfortunately, there is no Cardiology speciality at Likas Hospital. By then, Dr. Kumaraswamy fetched my wife from home to be with me. The doctors there said that they would shift me to QEHL 1. They sent us by ambulance and we reached QEHL by 6.30 pm.

You know, whenever I am driving on the roads of KK and I hear the siren of the ambulance, I would pull to the side of the road giving way to the ambulance wondering who may be in it and in what condition! Little did I know that I too would be in it one day with my wife besides me taking a ride to the emergency? Once I was wheeled into the emergency, I saw some of my old students whom as a teacher I had taught them Physiology back in India under the Melaka-Manipal Twinning Program. They were very much surprised to see me, but went on to immediately put needles for IV lines in both my hands, took blood samples, BP and ECG while talking to me. I was impressed to see how they had all matured exuding confidence and professionalism as doctors. Then, I asked them to inform Dr. Phanidranath Mahadasa consultant cardiologist at QEHL. By this time my wife had got hold of Dr. Phani's hand phone number and called to tell him what had happened. He came in immediately and saw the signs, symptoms and the ECG. He said I should have come straight to QEHL when I developed the problem as the delay may have caused more damage. He then asked the thrombolytic 'Tenectaplace' to be injected and I was monitored and an X-ray was taken. It was only after the thrombolytic was injected that the discomfort in the chest and pain began to reduce. He then went on to make arrangements for me to be transported by ambulance to Coronary Care Unit at QEHL 2 (Sabah Medical Centre). Just then Professor Madya Dr. Zainal Ariffin and Encik Zaidie came in to see me at QEHL and also gave the formal letter for my medical billing. It was very nice of them. By then Dr. Thiru Chelvum had taken my wife back home as our son was home all alone, not knowing what had happened. I was then shifted by ambulance to the Sabah Medical Centre by midnight, where they took very good care of me. By now the pain had subsided and I was kept in the Coronary Care Unit overnight for observation. Next morning cardiologist Dr. Liew Cheung, came on his rounds, examined me, and also performed an echocardiogram, showing me the damaged area (anteroseptal region) in the heart. Since I had no other indicators for a heart attack, they said it could be either due to stress or it could be hereditary. My father had passed away due to a heart attack when he was 60 years of age. Apart from that, no one else in our family has had any heart ailments. Imagine, in one day I had visited four different hospitals (SPU clinic, Likas hospital, QEHL I and QEHL II). What a journey!

The next day, I was shifted to a ward and kept under observation for the another five days. I was visited by our dean Prof. Dr. Osman Ali, Prof. Perumal Ramasamy, Prof. Soe Aung, Prof. Win Maung many of my fellow colleagues and many students. That showed how many of them really cared about me. I felt lucky and blessed too. I am extremely grateful to them for their concern, wishes and prayers. I was advised by Dr. Phani to undergo an angiogram to check the degree of blockage in the coronary arteries. He arranged an appointment for the angiogram to be carried out on 21st October (Thursday), 2010. So, I had to get re-admitted at SMC where the team from Institut Jantung Negara (IJN) in KL, came over to perform the angiogram. For this, I had to arrange to get a guarantee letter from UMS and the Social Welfare Office. Fortunately for me everyone was very helpful at every stage. Dr. Phani and Dr. Amin Ariff Nuruddin, the consultant cardiologist from IJN, carried out the angiogram.

A catheter was passed through the radial artery and a dye was injected. The coronary arteries were then viewed on-screen. The pictures were interesting to watch, but certainly not pleasing. They showed moderate to severe narrowing of the left descending coronary artery (They also provided me with a CD of the angiogram).

I was advised to undergo a bypass surgery, being told that the use of stents was not an alternative. After staying for two days I was discharged with medical leave till the 22nd of November 2010. I returned to work for a week (22nd -26th Nov.2010) and by then Dr. Phani got my appointment with Dato' Dr. Venugopal the Cardiothoracic Surgeon to undergo the bypass at IJN. They asked me to be there on the 28th of November 2010. Puan Alna and Mariane Kuntong from the Registrar's office arranged for my guarantee letter as well as my air tickets. I was asked to take along a Sarong - a dress which I had never used until then. So, we had to buy a couple of them, along with two sets of shirts with the front opening for use after the surgery. I was also asked to stop taking Aspirin and Flax (blood thinners) one week before the surgery (which I had). We had to make arrangements for my sister to come over from India to KK to take care of my son and for my brother-in-law to come down to KL to help her while I would be in the hospital.

Second part of my saga will continue in the next issue... please do read!

The Primary risk factors for heart attack include:

- Smoking
- High blood cholesterol (>5.2 mmol/L)
- An elevated LDL (>2.6 mmol/L)
- High blood pressure (>140/90 mm Hg at rest)
- Diabetes
- Sedentary lifestyle (Inactivity)

Secondary risk factors include:

- Obesity (being overweight)
- Uncontrolled stress and anger

