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March 28, 2007

Doctor takes saving lives to heart

BETH LUCAS, TRIBUNE

Anna Jarnagin said she feels lucky to be alive. The Mesa woman collapsed earlier this month in her doctor's office, suffering sudden cardiac failure.

"I guess you can say I was dead," she said.

But doctors shocked her with a defibrillator once at the office and then twice at Mercy Gilbert Medical Center in Gilbert to keep her heart going. If she'd been home alone, she could have been victim to sudden cardiac death due to heart arrhythmia, an irregular heartbeat caused by abnormal electrical impulses in the heart.

To protect her heart from stopping again, Dr. Himanshu Shukla inserted an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator, or ICD, inside her chest. The device is a small automatic defibrillator that rests above the heart. Wires run through the heart to the bottom chambers. The device regulates her heartbeat's electrical impulses, and will shock it into a normal rhythm if necessary.

In February, Shukla opened the Cardiac Arrhythmia Institute at Banner Desert Medical Center in Mesa, with plans to make the center a proactive educational tool for heart arrhythmia patients.

In the past year, Shukla has donated about \$70,000 in defibrillators — using his own money and that of donors — to schools in the Cave Creek, Mesa, Paradise Valley and Scottsdale unified school districts. On Thursday, he will present a defibrillator at Mesa's Hohokam Stadium.

His goal is to prevent this top killer by expanding the use of defibrillators and helping patients learn about treatment.

Shukla, 32, worked with pioneers in the electrophysiology field while in medical school.

He continues to help research technology, which at one time had patients pushing defibrillators on carts, to the point that a simple procedure called an ablation can cure patients and send them home the same day.

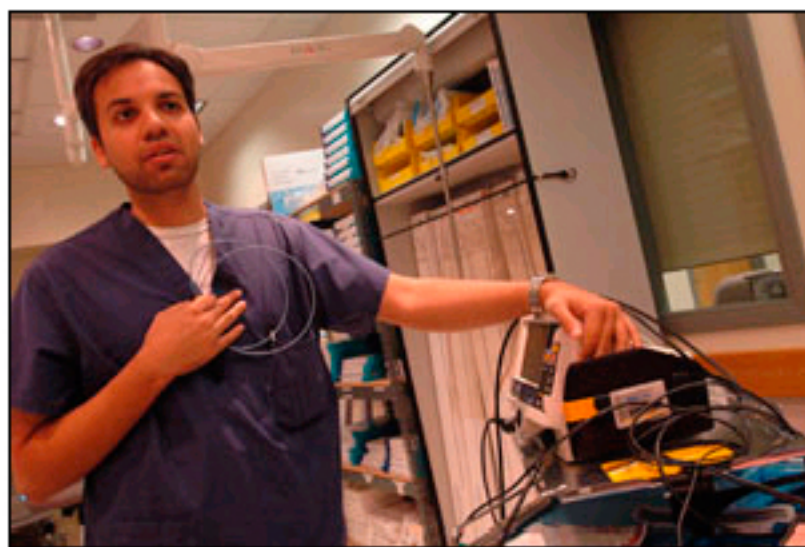
A cardiac ablation involves the insertion of a catheter into the heart, where radio frequency energy is used to burn tiny scars into damaged heart tissue that had been causing an erratic electrical impulse.

Shukla's staff is preparing a Web site that will educate the public about arrhythmia and lead them through the tests and diagnoses. At 8 a.m. May 19, Shukla will talk about new therapies and approaches at the first of what is expected to be quarterly seminars on arrhythmia conditions at Val Vista Lakes Community Center, 1600 E. Lakeside Drive.

Pamela D'Agnolo, of Chandler, said she is living the difference between suffering with a chronic case that left her so pained and weak that she struggled to shop for groceries, and the cure Shukla provided her.

"Shortness of breath and dizziness made it very difficult to climb steps — to even walk from a parking lot into a store, much less trying to round the store to purchase items. It was an ordeal, it really was."

D'Agnolo went home less than 24 hours following her ablation. For more information on the institute, to donate toward defibrillators or to R.S.V.P. for the May seminar, call (480) 889-1573.



Dr. Himanshu Shukla talks about new heart procedures at Banner Desert Medical Center in Mesa. Shukla has donated defibrillators to a variety of schools, and will present one at a Mesa stadium Thursday.

Ashley Lowery, For the Tribune

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