

POLICE OFFICER EARNS “BADGE OF HEALTH” 3 YEARS AFTER HEART ATTACK



Seacoast police officer Bruce Page, 46, has not had ice cream in three years, nor soda in two. He rarely has steak or other red meat. He added cardiovascular exercise, such as running into his daily routine. His lifestyle changes resulted after meeting with Cardiology Nurse Practitioner Vanessa Preble of Core Cardiology/Exeter Hospital.

Before his sudden heart attack, at age 43, he felt he like he was in pretty good shape because “I could bench press 350 pounds, and thought, ‘hey, I’m exercising and I’m in great shape’,” he said. “In reality, it didn’t help my heart at all.”

In July 2015, while on patrol, he started to feel ill, but he didn’t think much of it. He was sweating, and his chest felt heavy, but he simply thought he was getting the flu, or maybe having a panic attack (though he had never had one before). When he returned to the police station, he started having trouble breathing, and thanks to the encouragement of his Sergeant, he went next door to the fire station to be checked by the paramedics. They performed an EKG and realized immediately he was having a heart attack. They rushed him to the Emergency Department at Exeter Hospital. Two of his arteries were 100% blocked, with the other two 90% blocked. They performed an emergent angioplasty with clot removal.

Four days later, we helped coordinate his quadruple bypass surgery at another local hospital as Exeter does not perform cardiac surgery. He was out of work for two months.

In May 2017, he was scheduled for his annual cardiology office visit, almost 2 years after his heart attack. His cardiologist was not available and, as is typical clinical practice, he was scheduled to see Vanessa that day. She reviewed his history and discussed his current symptoms. He told Vanessa that he had not been exercising regularly, with a fairly sedentary job, sitting at a desk for most of the hours of the day with his position as Detective. They talked about his family and his two young daughters, which at times provoked brief stressful encounters. He admitted to not eating a heart healthy diet, rather enjoying prime rib and 'flaky puffs'. She noted his weight was up from the year prior and up even more from when he had his heart attack.

It was during this visit with Vanessa that he received her frank advice. “What are you doing?” are the words Bruce recalls Vanessa saying to him. These words, and the following words that were delivered with more direction and education, truly hit home with him. She questioned why he had made no lifestyle changes following his heart attack, encouraging him to think about the future and being there for his wife and daughters. It was after meeting Vanessa, who challenged

him to focus more on lifestyle changes, including primarily whole food, plant-based nutrition and daily exercise, that his life began to change.

Bruce admits that while Vanessa's forthright style may not be for everyone, for him it was a lifesaver – literally. “Today I eat a lot healthier and exercise. I've lost 20 pounds and I feel so much better,” he said. During his annual visit with his cardiologist in May 2018, he was able to verbally thank her for their encounter the year prior, and the difference she truly made for him. “It really hit me that if I wanted be around to see my kids grow up, I needed to examine what I was eating and add cardiovascular exercise to my daily life,” said Bruce. He put his newfound understanding into action. Never a runner before, this year in 2018 he has run a 5K, a 10K and even a 10-mile race. “I don't think I would have done any of these things were it not for Vanessa,” said Bruce. “She changed my life.” Thus, he earned his Badge of Health.

Vanessa's perspective: For me, Bruce's story is extremely gratifying. He is one of the first patients that actually thanked me for my work, for the thoughtful time I spent with him, that actually made a difference. His visit is not unlike other patients I have met many times before. I approach each patient encounter with adage of ‘meet patients where they are at’. I try to provide an opportunity to educate patients about their cardiovascular disease process and then encourage patients to understand that their daily choices have a large impact on their overall health. The majority of our healthcare system is about chronic disease management and treating conditions after they have been diagnosed. My clinical passion is Lifestyle Medicine, which is to treat the cause of the disease, but also to prevent it in the first place. It is not all about the ‘pills and procedures’ but the way a patient chooses to live there life that make a huge difference.

Bruce's perspective: I have to admit that I still enjoy an occasional sweet treat (I have an affinity for cookies), and I am not a “health nut.” However, if I hadn't met Vanessa, I would not have made these lifestyle changes.