

After surviving a heart attack, Everett resident Domenico Del Sonno enjoys spending time with his grandchildren now more than ever. His grandchildren include (L:R) Lea, 8, Nadia, 6, Sofia, 9 ½ and Antonio, 5.

Advanced cardiac care saves patient's life



The last thing Domenico Del Sonno, 69, of Everett, remembered was having an uncomfortable feeling in his chest and collapsing in the backyard of his friend's house. Seconds later he was lying unconscious with his friend frantically calling 911 while his friend's daughter performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Del Sonno, a retired construction foreman, had suffered a cardiac arrest and did not regain consciousness until many days later. But in that time he was the central figure in a life-saving drama that illustrates the advanced medical care available at Hallmark Health System (HHS). Although his prognosis looked bleak, the Emergency Department (ED) medical team, hospitalists and nurses from the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Melrose-Wakefield Hospital (MWH) came to realize Del Sonno was a good candidate for hypothermia therapy, a new treatment for severe heart attack victims where the medical team cools the body to slow the metabolism and preserve neurological and organ function.

When a heart attack occurs, a number of biological problems can occur as the brain, heart and other organs compete for oxygen. Research has shown that cooling the body down to 91 degrees allows vital organs to survive longer by decreasing their demand for oxygen. The physicians and nurses from the ED and the ICU at MWH worked quickly and efficiently applying special cooling pads to Del Sonno's legs and chest while a cooling device lowered his body temperature.

"Cooling the patient decreases the body temperature," explains Lawrence Moschitto, MD, who is Del Sonno's cardiologist. "The lower temperature slows down the deterioration of cells throughout the body. Domenico went through quite an ordeal. He is a very lucky man."

The hypothermia therapy is a clear example of the latest advances in medical, cardiac and diagnostic care you will find at HHS. The health system also houses the region's only Cardiac & Endovascular Center staffed by highly-skilled surgeons, physicians and nurses with a solid reputation for always providing the most expert care in the region.

The treatment saved Del Sonno's life and kept him in good condition so he could have a head start on the road back to good health. "I don't remember anything about the treatment," he recalls. "I was completely out, but those doctors and nurses worked miracles. The care was outstanding. They explained everything to me and my family. Now I feel like a million bucks."

Today Del Sonno is doing everything he can to maintain a healthier lifestyle. He has lost weight and exercises religiously at the Cardiac Rehabilitation Program at MWH three times a week. "I feel blessed that I am still here to enjoy my wife, family and my six grandchildren. Melrose-Wakefield Hospital saved my life," stated Del Sonno.

For more information on emergency and cardiac services, visit www.hallmarkhealth.org and select "Clinical Programs."