

Wald team saves woman's life

By Michael Bennett

Strange feeling

Lillian Lewis, a Lafleche woman in her mid-fifties, was given a second chance at life because of a borrowed heart monitor unit and the professional and skilled use of the monitor by Wald Ambulance.

Mrs. Lewis had suffered a serious heart attack early on Sunday morning, November 15, and was being cared for at Kincaid hospital. When her condition was stabilized and it was felt that she could be safely transferred to Regina General Hospital, Wald Ambulance in Assiniboia was called to transfer Mrs. Lewis.

Wald Ambulance received the call from director of nursing Daisy Frostad at 4:20 p.m. The nursing director asked if they had purchased their monitor unit, saying that Dr. Gowda, Mrs. Lewis's doctor, felt his patient would benefit from having the unit during the transfer.

"I told her we did not have our unit yet," Steve Wald told The Times, "but I had a funny feeling and told her I that I might be able to borrow Lafleche's unit. I don't know what it was," he said, "but I felt we had better borrow the unit from Lafleche Union Hospital before transferring Mrs. Lewis. Mrs. Lewis would be well stabilized and ready for transfer, but I had a funny feeling that we should borrow the portable heart monitor unit from Lafleche hospital anyhow."

The heart monitor unit gives the attendants essential information about the patient's condition. The unit consists of a monitor (a television-like screen), an electrocardiograph printout — to assess the heart's performance — and a defibrillator to shock the heart back to life if complete cardiac arrest should occur. With the screen and printout to

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Steve Wald



Donna Wald



Ida Orten

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monitor the electrical activity of the heart, a qualified attendant (doctor or R.N.) knows which drugs to administer — or not to administer. It also tells the attendant how the heart is responding to the drug dosage.

As with all such transfers, a registered nurse must accompany the patient to administer any drugs, and RN Ida Orten joined Steve Wald and his sister Donna, currently taking her Emergency Medical Training, before leaving for Kincaid.

The portable monitor unit was picked up at Lafleche Union Hospital, and Mrs. Lewis was then able to be hooked to the unit immediately at Kincaid. They left Kincaid about 5:15 p.m.

Seemed all right

Steve Wald told The Times that Mrs. Lewis was very well stabilized at Kincaid Union hospital, and said that she was doing very well until they reached Gravelbourg.

Donna Wald told The Times that Mrs. Lewis began to suffer 18 premature heartbeats per minute. It was a dangerous point for the patient, but Mrs. Lewis's heartbeat returned to normal and she was talking. She told Donna and Ida, Ida was watching the intravenous, that she felt "okay."

Both Donna and Ida told The Times that Mrs. Lewis seemed fine until they reached Mossbank.

Knew she was dead

"We have all seen it before," Steve told The Times. Even without the alarm sounding on the monitor, all three knew Mrs. Lewis had died.

"She went into ventricular fibrillation," he said. "She had no heartbeat and had stopped breathing. There was a small amount of electrical activity in the heart. She was clinically dead." He went on to say that in other such cases they could only turn around and drive back to the funeral home in Assiniboia.

"We all knew at the same time," Ida Orten said. "We knew she was dead and we had to do something."

Steve Wald, on hearing the monitor's alarm, quickly pulled the ambulance to the side of the road. Donna and Ida were already working on Mrs. Lewis before he got into the back of the ambulance. "They were already doing CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and cardiac compression," Steve said. "Donna was giving her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and then had an airway inserted and was ventilating her with 100 per cent oxygen." (Unless the patient gets oxygen almost immediately, extensive brain damage can result — even if the patient survives.)

Knew what to do

Despite all their efforts, Mrs. Lewis showed no sign of coming back. "At that time we knew what to do," Ida Orten said.

Steve Wald prepared the power pack for the defibrillator to shock the patient's heart back to life. "I shocked her four times," he said, adding that Ida and Donna were giving Mrs. Lewis CPR between each shock. "Her heart would start, but would stop again," he said.

He then increased the power on the unit and on the fifth attempt Mrs. Lewis' heart started and continued to beat. RN Ida Orten then had the crucial role of getting the intravenous started again and regulating the drug Xylocaine to the patient. Too much or too little would be

critical. From then on Ida Orten's eyes would not leave the monitor screen.

Done it all

They reached Moose Jaw at 6:40 and went to the Moose Jaw Union Hospital believing Mrs. Lewis would be admitted there. The attending doctor examined Mrs. Lewis thoroughly and told them "they had done it all — keep on going."

Ken Schneikart and Dave Roy (Dave works weekends manning the radio) arranged a police escort to Regina and notified Regina General's coronary care unit of the situation.

Mrs. Lewis arrived at Regina General Hospital alert and able to recall everything up until her cardiac arrest at Mossbank.

The staff of the cardiac unit praised the three for the job they had done, and Mrs. Lewis's nurses told her that she would not have lived but for the efforts of the people in the ambulance.

Ultimate thanks

Dr. Basu, Director of Coronary Care at Regina General, told The Times that if the events as outlined by The Times were correct, he had nothing but praise for the ambulance staff. He went on to say that every ambulance in the province which transfers coronary patients should be equipped with a heart monitor unit.

Laurie Rigetti, a daughter of Mrs. Lewis, told The Times "It's remarkable! They saved my mother's life." Her brother, Master Cpl. Wade Lewis of The Canadian Forces, Lahr, W. Germany, who came home to Lafleche on learning of his mother's heart attack, told The Times "The family can't thank them enough. It was an excellent job." Mrs. Lewis has two daughters; Laurie Rigetti and Janice Bohrn, and two sons; Wade and Bob.

When told by The Times of the comments of Mrs. Lewis's family and Dr. Basu, Steve Wald said, "We all got thanks enough when we found Mrs. Lewis was alive."

According to the family, Mrs. Lillian Lewis will be coming home some time this week.