

My Heart Story -- Darrell Dunlap

I have a family history of heart disease with my grandfather (age 55), father (age 67), uncle (age 66) and brother (age 70) all dying from heart attacks or strokes. Thus, I have been very aware of the potential for heart problems in my life.

I began taking statin drugs at age 37 for high cholesterol which seemed to be effective. I also began taking a high blood pressure drug later in life in my sixties which was also effective.

During an annual physical with my Primary Care Physician in 2022 he noted a systolic heart murmur which led to me having an ECHO test which found a severely dilated aortic root and proximal ascending aorta.

Further tests followed – CTA, CT, RHC/LHC which confirmed the need to repair the root aortic aneurysm with a vascular graft and to replace the aortic valve with a bioprosthesis valve. I also had blockage in several arteries and needed a triple by-pass. While not completely surprised due to my family history I was nevertheless shocked at the extent of the damage – especially since I really had no symptoms or pain. I was told I was pretty much a ticking time bomb. That got my attention!

After the urgency of my situation was fully explained by my cardiac surgeon I did proceed with surgery at Providence Hospital on January 10, 2023.

I spent pretty much the entire day in prep and surgery. I was on a Coronary By-Pass machine for 273 minutes. My total time in the hospital was nine days.

My recovery went well and was fairly uneventful. I am very thankful for the professional and excellent care provided by my surgeons and all the nurses and support staff at the hospital.

I did go through the cardiac rehab program at Providence and found it very helpful. It involved monitored exercise therapy and education on topics related to cardiovascular health. I would recommend this to all heart surgery patients.

Now it is two years post surgery and I am doing great. I have no limitations on my activities. Daily walks and pickleball a couple times a week make up most of my physical activity. I see my cardiologist every six months and have received positive assessments. I am still working on improving my diet – more vegetables and less snacks!