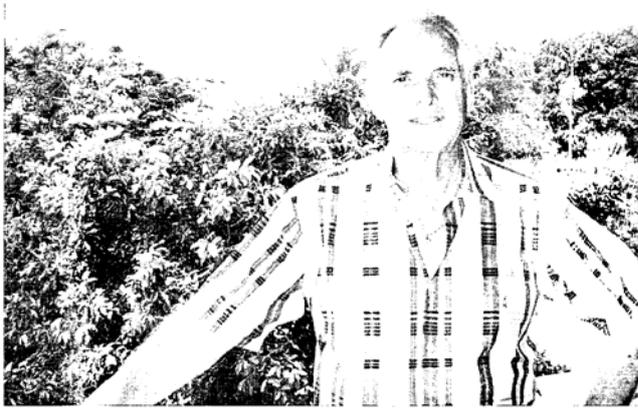


## My close call with death – heart attack



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Only 10% and 15% of people who have a Cardiac Arrest and get CPR performed within 2 minutes plus can be shocked by a defibrillator survive. Each minute with out CPR reduces survival rate by 7-10%.

Having a Cardiac Arrest away from quality medical service or if a second arrest occurs, then this drops survival rate to 2 to 3%.

Not many people survive more than 2 simultaneous Cardiac Arrests.

My name is David Sherar, 61 years of age, originally from Western Australia. I was a wheat and sheep farmer from 1960 to 1979 after which I went to Perth and into real estate and property development. In 2004 I came with my partner, Margaret Delbridge, to live in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Since arriving, we have purchased, renovated and sold a number of properties. During this time we have assisted with training and management of the Ni-Vanuatu builders who have worked on our properties. We have also been very much involved in trying to upgrade Peacock Estate, Malapoa for the betterment of all Leaseholders and Ifira as custom owners.

I had never been in hospital. The only illness I've had was kidney stones about 9 years ago that were passed without problem. During the 6 years we have been here I have been physically active, looked after my health, eaten healthily and slept well. I don't smoke and am a light drinker, enjoying a glass of red wine with dinner most nights. In 2004 I went to my doctor in Australia for a checkup and found I had very high blood pressure at around 195/160. In February 2005 he suggested I have a Doppler Ultrasound Duplex Carotid Scan on my heart. It showed a small amount of plaque in the right carotid artery but was not a cause for concern. I took Ramipril tablets to lower my blood pressure until about 4 months ago when I developed Angioedema. Since coming off the Ramipril my blood pressure remained within normal ranges so I never dreamed I had a problem with my heart. None of this prevented what happened to me on New Years Eve day 2009.

At about 9am on Thursday 31st December I drove to Wilco Hardware to purchase some fly-wire. When I got out of the truck and went inside I felt a bit funny in my chest and was burping wind from my breakfast cereal. I put it down to indigestion as I do get a bit of reflux

so never thought any more about it. I walked from the entrance to the back of the Trade area and then to where the fly-wire is kept. A walk of about 70 metres in total. When I started talking to the salesperson I felt worse so I sat on a chair for about 3 minutes. There was no pain just a bit of tightness and an uncomfortable feeling right in the centre of my chest for a length of about 75 to 100 mm from the bottom of my rib cage up. The tightness more or less went off and I felt ok so I got back up and went back to get the fly-wire but by the time I got there it started to come on again. I said to James, the salesperson, that I did not feel well and quickly phoned Margaret while James ran to get Jacko, the manager, who immediately called ProMedical. By this time I was starting to feel really unwell and dizzy so I lay down on the floor. I still had no pain, just some tightness in the centre of my chest and lung area but I was feeling weak and not in control of my body – I was somewhat spaced out.

Within 4 minutes ProMedical were on site and starting to treat me for a heart attack. I could hear them talking and asking me things but I was feeling terrible and starting to lose consciousness. Margaret had also arrived and I said that I could feel myself going (blacking out) but they all kept saying to me “stay with us, David, you must try to stay with us”. I found it very hard as I just wanted to close my eyes plus the movement of the large fan above was making my eyes and head feel worse. To this day I have no recall about what they did or gave to me but have been told I was given Aspirin to drink and oxygen. I couldn’t move so the Wilco managers and staff helped the paramedics to lift me onto the stretcher before I was wheeled out to the Ambulance.

All I wanted was to feel better and to have Margaret with me in the Ambulance to Vila Bay Hospital as I now knew I was in real trouble. On the way all I could think of was hurry up and get there so they can make me feel better. It was a horrible sensation. Not painful, just weak, uncomfortable, unwell and can’t do anything feeling.

On arrival nothing had improved and I remember being told by Doctor Dermot Hurley that I had had a heart attack and they needed to get intravenous catheters into my arms for drips and put me on oxygen to get more oxygen into my bloodstream. By this time I felt so bad that they could have cut off my arm and I would not have cared, all I wanted was to feel better. I know that I kept asking how long before I would feel better but no one would say. I just needed someone to say something even if it was not true and eventually Margaret said 5 minutes. It’s silly but her telling me that helped me heaps as it gave me hope and something to work to. Only 5 more minutes I thought!!! Margaret stayed with me all the time and I was comforted by her being there holding my hand and toes. The bond and love between us is strong and she gave me the strength to fight for my life. I did not want to die. I kept thinking I still have so much I want to do and enjoy but I also knew that I was in the hands of the people working on me and that I had to stay positive. I can’t remember how long it was after I arrived at the hospital but I did start to feel a tiny bit better and was able to talk a bit and answer a few questions.

Then it happened.

About 40 minutes after arriving at hospital I had a Cardiac Arrest. I was clinically dead for a couple of minutes as my heart had stopped pumping blood. I don’t remember it happening but I do remember coming round. I remember seeing a big grey/black rectangular screen about 20 metres ahead of where I was looking in my mind. Then a black tar road appeared tapering off into the distance with an avenue of trees down each side, joining over the top of the road, and then finally I saw floating about a metre above the road many bright yellow daisy flowers. When I eventually opened my eyes I saw one of the paramedics with the

defibrillator paddles just above my chest. I have since found out that I had been given CPR and two shocks to get my heart started again. Margaret said it was terrible to see, as I went a horrible green/grey colour and started frothing at the mouth and making awful gasping snoring sounds. She was told to leave as soon as it happened. On revival I can remember Dr Dermot Hurley, the ProMedical medics, Glee and Roger and Vila Bay nurses working frantically to get me stable again. I started to feel sick and vomited a couple of times but eventually I did start to feel a little better. Margaret had been allowed back in to see me and I thought I was going to be ok now. I did not really understand then what had happened but was glad that whatever they were giving me was making me feel better.

The second arrest happened about 30 minutes after the first.

Margaret later told me that she thought I was not right prior to it happening as my hands started to lose colour and my face colour had started to change again. I was talking one minute and the next I was gone. I had no idea and felt nothing. It is not like fainting where you have a funny black hazy feeling in the head; with this you just go unconscious. CPR was started and defibrillators charged ready to shock to try to get the heart to start pumping properly again. If you are very lucky they may succeed in reviving you and fortunately for me I was one of the very lucky ones. From what I have read and been told, only 2 or 3% of people manage to survive 2 cardiac arrests. The other strange thing was that I had the same vision in my mind as before when being revived. This time Roger was doing CPR when I opened my eyes and it was hurting my chest. I straight away said to him that was enough as it was hurting. Apparently I had 3 shocks increasing in power each time to get my heart to start beating properly. I was vomiting again and Dermot, the paramedics and the nurses all worked to stabilise me again by giving me different injections, drips and medicine. I have no idea what they gave me but after about half an hour I started to feel better.

Margaret came back in and I was very happy to see her. She looked very drawn and frightened and told me she thought she had lost me this time. Luckily, while I was arresting, our friends, Gary Burton and Sue Bedford, were able to comfort and support her. When I was feeling better Margaret told me that Dermot had spent a long time talking by phone to a Cardiac Specialist in New Zealand to make sure that he was giving me the best treatment to enable me the best chance of survival.

My heart attack was caused by narrowing of the artery in one place which got blocked by a clot which lead to a large heart attack and two cardiac arrests. Unfortunately at the time of my attack there were no thrombolytic drugs (clot busting drugs) available here in Vanuatu which would have saved me from most of the heart damage and probably avoided the two cardiac arrests. Thrombolytic drugs are not cheap, costing about 150,000 vatu per injection but they do save heart damage. Vila Bay Hospital had a dose in stock for two years up until about two weeks before my attack when an overseas visitor urgently required it. They had ordered a new supply but it had not arrived by the time I needed it. Lets hope it gets here before any one else needs it.

The next day I was feeling much better and asked how soon before I could go home. Dermot said I needed to stay in Vila Bay Hospital for at least four days to make sure that I was stable. I had my vital signs checked every 2 hours extending to 4 and 6 hours as the days went by. At all times I was hooked up to a heart monitor. Margaret was allowed to stay with me in my hospital room and we would wake up at different times to watch the monitor to see if my heart was beating normally or what we thought was normal. I went home after 3 nights.

Apparently the first 24 hours are the most critical and each day after that you are less like to have another heart attack and this continues for about 2 weeks.

My first night at home was very frightening for both Margaret and me as I did not have the security of the monitor checking my pulse and heart beat or the nurses coming in to do observations. We got through the night and we felt a bit more confident. Margaret went to ProMedical for CPR training and was able to borrow an automatic defibrillator from them just in case I had another arrest. She also arranged for me to have a sitter in the afternoon so she was able to go out to do some shopping and also go to work. I wish to thank Lyndal, Sue, Elaine and Tracey for giving me their time and for giving Margaret a chance to have a break with peace of mind that I was in safe hands.

Dermot had given me a referral for a cardiologist in Auckland we booked to depart Wednesday the 13th January. My first appointment was with Dr Fiona Stewart at 10.45am the next day. When Fiona read Dermot's report she admitted me straight away to the Mercy Hospital Cardiac Care Unit where I was immediately connected to a heart monitor. I spent the afternoon having tests, including echocardiogram, ultrasound, blood and ECG's and was booked in for an angiogram the next morning. This was an experience in itself. Firstly, a patch on my right wrist and groin were shaved and swabbed with Betadine. This gave the specialist two entry sites to choose from. Once in the lab my hand was strapped to a board and I was given a small amount of sedative to calm me and a local anaesthetic to numb the entry site. A dye was injected into my blood stream so the specialist could see my arteries on the monitors as the Angiogram cable is inserted. I lay back listening and talking to the nurses and Dr Jim Stewart and looking at the 4 monitors. After about 5 minutes I heard him say something about the wire being in position and asking the nurse to get the stent. I asked if the wire was inside my heart and he said yes and that he had already found the problem.

I could not believe it as I felt absolutely nothing. He said that arteries have no nerves inside them so this means no feeling. Shortly after, the stent was in place in my left frontal (anterior) artery and he asked for two different sized balloons, one after the other, which he inserted inside the stent and blew up to enlarge its internal diameter. The stent is like a very small hard metal spring. Mine is a drug-eluting stent and is 3.0x24mm in size. The wire was simply a guide over which the stent and balloon are somehow run to get them to the right place in the correct artery. Once the stent was in place the wire was withdrawn and my wrist tightly wrapped where the needle was inserted to stop any bleeding. I could have bled very easily due to my blood being thinned by the drugs I was taking to prevent further blockages. Prior to me going into the lab Margaret was given a buzzer that the nurse called when I was finished and then she and her brother were invited into the lab and Dr Stewart explained the whole operation. He said he was very pleased with the outcome and it had all gone very well. I was then taken back to the ward.

Fiona visited that evening to say all looked good but that there was a small chance of an adverse outcome for the next 24 hours. She mentioned the possibility of the stent collapsing or that I could have a reaction to the dye. We had thought all the problems were over. About 15 minutes after she left I started to feel funny. I started to see stars and felt faint as I had when I had the heart attack. I thought I was going again and it really did frighten me. Margaret called the nurse who checked me out and said my oxygen was low and it was probably a reaction to the dye. She told me I must drink a lot of fluids as the dye could damage my kidneys if it is not flushed out which can take about 3 days. The nurse stayed with us for about half an hour and told us about her husband who had been extremely sick

with leukaemia for the last 12 months but was now getting better. With the extra oxygen and her story I started to feel much better and by the time she left I was settled again and no longer feeling frightened.

I was in Mercy Hospital for 3 days and then stayed on in Auckland for another 7 days.

We now know that my heart has sustained major damage. It will never repair but with 12 months of drugs it is hoped that my heart may improve in function by using other smaller arteries to take over some of the work area that has been lost. I will be on drugs for the rest of my life but should have no more problems unless I overdo things. I will never be able to do many of the things that I used to do but I am alive. I was told to do gentle exercise so try to walk most days but have realised that I had been doing too much as I have been getting some tightness back in my chest. I now take it easy.

I cannot stress too much that if you ever have any tightness in the chest or find you are a bit breathless when walking or running then go and get checked out. I had been experiencing breathlessness when walking up hills but put this down to my indigestion problems. When it finally hit I had hardly any symptoms just a little tightness in my chest. How I wish I'd had the breathlessness properly investigated.

If it was not for the quick thinking of James and Jacko at Wilco, ProMedical, Dermot and the Vila Bay nurses I would not be here today. I owe my life to all of them. I am one extremely lucky man and feel I have been given the opportunity to help others with my story. You never know but it may save someone else from ending up in my situation.