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FULL TRANSCRIPT

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ASCVD Perspectives portrays the journey of a typical patient through their various care settings after a recent cardiac event and being diagnosed with clinical ASCVD. This podcast is intended to be a guide to educate patients on shared decision-making practices and provide examples of questions they can incorporate into their personal experience. It also serves as a model to help clinicians understand different ways they can empower their patients to become advocates and active leaders in their own disease management.

00:31

The patients used in the series are paid actors, and any recommendations or information are not to be construed as a directive, endorsement, or medical advice. Always check with your provider before starting or changing your medications, diet, or exercise regimen.

00:47

Hi, I'm Dr. Kevin Hwang. It's great to meet you. Levi (patient):. I see that, looking at this discharge from the hospital that they sent me, looks like you went to the E.R. with chest pain. They did some EKGs and blood work and diagnosed you with a heart attack. And they did a cardiac catheterization, found a couple of blockages in your arteries, and actually put a stent in one of them. Then later on, they did a stress test afterwards and things looked pretty good. And now you're here, so that's great. So how are you feeling today and what brings you in? How can I help you?

01:24

Dr. Hwang, thank you for seeing me today. I'm starting to hear things about, I'm doing my research, and I've heard the word or the term ASCVD passed around. I'm not sure if that is part of what's affecting me, but I wanted to know what that was and how does it impact me?

01:43

Yeah, that's a great question. So, I'm sure you heard a lot of terminology thrown around in the hospital, maybe seeing some on the paperwork that you got. So, ASCVD is atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease and that's quite a mouthful. So we can break it down a little bit. Let's focus on the last part. Cardiovascular disease, the disease of the heart and or the blood vessels, like the arteries that carry blood and oxygen from your heart to the rest of the

body. You know, to your arms and legs, the internal organs, and the brain. But your heart is also a muscle itself. It's constantly working. So it also needs blood and oxygen. And the heart itself relies on a large network of very important arteries called the coronary arteries in order to get its own blood supply.

02:35

So that's what happened to you. You had an issue with your coronary arteries, the arteries that carry blood, the heart itself. That's why they put in the stent.

02:43

So, that's what cardiovascular disease is, but most cardiovascular disease is caused by atherosclerosis. That's why they call it atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease and that's simply when you have the steady plaque buildup inside your arteries and the plaque can narrow or completely block the flow of blood through your arteries, sort of like a clot blocking up the pipes.

03:07

more years of good, healthy life. If we pay attention to the right things, pay attention to risk factors.

05:02

OK, so there's nothing that I could have really done to have prevented this? Like, maybe...How could I have caught it earlier? I caught it because I was having chest pains. But was there anything I could have done to catch it earlier?

05:17

That's a great question. So, a lot of people actually, they're in a similar situation as you, where their first symptom of ASCVD, or atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, is a heart attack or stroke. Or their first manifestation, the first symptom, is chest pain. So, they've already developed ASCVD over the course of years, but it didn't cause any symptoms until that first traumatic episode. And that's unfortunate. But there are a lot of risk factors that you know about that can lead to ASCVD.

05:49

And if they're caught and detected early, we can really prevent it, or at least dramatically lower the risk of that happening. So, these risk factors are things you may have heard about, like high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, smoking, physical inactivity, an unhealthy diet and being overweight or obese. So, if we knew about those things beforehand and really addressed those, it could have prevented this. But we don't ever actually bring the risk down to zero where we could lower it significantly by paying attention to those things early on.

06:26

So, I'm going to say that the risk factors that you know about that can lead to ASCVD are things like high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, smoking, physical inactivity, an unhealthy diet and being overweight or obese. So, if we knew about those things beforehand and really addressed those, it could have prevented this. But we don't ever actually bring the risk down to zero where we could lower it significantly by paying attention to those things early on.

major risk factor for heart disease. We've talked about high cholesterol, and again, if your LDL is high, we definitely want to treat you with a statin medication. But even if it's low, even if it's below a hundred, you would want to still be on a statin because you've already had a heart attack.

11:01

You already have ASCVD. What we're trying to do is prevent a second one from occurring. So that really helps out. I mean, that's been shown in research studies to really lower the risk for a subsequent heart attack by being on a statin. Smoking: If you don't smoke, don't start. If you currently smoke, stop, because it's a major risk factor. And then we're talking about afterwards of the kind of boring, but very important, things like being very physically active, being consistently physically active, not being sedentary, eating a healthy diet, losing weight if you're overweight.

11:34

Those are the things that really help lower your risk. And also there's other medications, like a daily aspirin, would be helpful in your case. It's not really helpful in everybody, but someone who's already had ASCVD or a heart attack or stroke should take an aspirin. That reduces the stickiness of certain blood cells in your bloodstream and that reduces the risk for having another heart attack.

11:54

OK, so if I feel, you know, down the line, or in a month or two, or whenever, if I feel relatively fine, what happens if I ignore this problem and how will I know once I'm better? Are the tests going to show that I'm improving?

12:10

Yeah, I mean, we do want to pay attention to the symptoms, so that's important. Like if you have chest pain or problems breathing, lightheadedness, heart beating too irregularly or too quickly, those things may be hint that the ASCVD is getting worse. But, you know, people can have, as I mentioned before, people can have ASCVD and feel completely fine. Even if you feel fine, we still want to pay attention to those risk factors because things can get worse even if you feel physically fine, but the blood pressure is still very high or you develop diabetes or cholesterol is still high, things like that. So, it's still important, no matter how you're feeling, to get regular checkups and monitor things like blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, what kind of diet and exercise. So, yeah, it's a great question. A lot of people feel fine, but we have to regularly look at the things that can raise your risk and make sure we're addressing those.

13:11

Yeah. So, a couple more questions for you, Doc. What resources are available to help me understand my diagnosis? I know that, like, when I go home, I might not remember everything you're saying right now. So, how can I study up and learn about this myself?

gradually into your daily habits. You know, things like if you have high blood pressure, you want to measure your blood pressure at home regularly. You don't want to just look at it in the doctor's office. You need to be doing that at home because you spend most of the time at home rather than in the doctor's office. So getting in the habit of measuring at home would be great.

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