

Quick ER Diagnosis Saves A Life - Elsayh Man Grateful For Dr. David Burnside

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ALTON – William McAnulty thought he might just be having an anxiety attack when he came to the Alton Memorial Hospital Emergency Department on Sept. 3. Had he known then what it actually was, his anxiety would have gone even higher.

Thanks to a quick diagnosis by Dr. David Burnside, an ER physician at AMH, the 36-year-old McAnulty was sent to Missouri Baptist Medical Center immediately and underwent a six-hour open-heart surgery the following day which likely saved his life. The Elsah, IL, native is thankful for the work done by Dr. Burnside and all the AMH ED team.

“I actually don’t remember a lot of what happened at Alton Memorial because I was out of it for much of the time,” McAnulty said. “I had shortness of breath and just didn’t feel very good at all. Most were thinking it was just a panic attack, but Dr. Burnside noticed something and ordered a CT scan. There was a hole in my heart wall and an unusual amount of fluid leaking from my heart, and he recommended that I get sent to ‘MoBap.’”

At MBMC, McAnulty was diagnosed with an infection and an aneurysm based on the CT scan done at AMH, which led to the surgery.

It’s not the way that William and his wife, Joanna, would have preferred to spend their Labor Day weekend. But without Dr. Burnside’s diagnosis and the surgery performed Sept. 4 by Dr. Joshua Baker, a cardiothoracic surgeon at MBMC, it likely would have been William’s last weekend.

McAnulty was already being monitored by cardiologists at AMH because of a bicuspid aortic valve, meaning the valve has two flaps (cusps) instead of three. It may cause a narrowed or obstructed aortic valve opening -- aortic valve stenosis -- making it difficult for the heart to pump blood into the aorta, which is the body's main artery.

“I was told that without the surgery that things would have burst and I wouldn’t have made it past Monday,” William said. “We’re just grateful that Dr. Burnside took the time to look at things so we could find out what was wrong.

“The surgery was really tough for my wife because I was sedated for 12 hours, in case they needed to go back in. But it turned out fine.”

McAnulty teaches seventh-grade social studies in the Ritenour (Mo.) School District, though now he’s on a three-month leave while he recovers. He had a few weeks of receiving antibiotics at the AMH Infusion Center before some physical therapy targeting his cardiovascular system.

“I’m feeling great now,” he said. “I know I’ll never feel as poorly as I did that Friday night when I came in. They have me on a heart-healthy diet for a while. It’s bland, but it’s nothing that I can’t do. It beats the alternative. When they tell you that you need open-heart surgery to save you, there’s not much choice.”

McAnulty was in Missouri Baptist for nine days and is home now, walking a mile a day. “They say I will have a better quality of life when all this therapy is over,” he said. “I’m fortunate to be here, and I have to thank Dr. Burnside for that.”