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On Getting by With a Little Help from Your Friends

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By Mike Taigman

Some of you may remember an article I wrote about my cholesterol (February 2002). I love working with doctors in EMS systems, on protocols and on research projects. I can't stand going to see them for my own health care. Reluctantly, I had my first physical in a decade around the first of last year. The short ending to a long story is that my cholesterol was 244, well within the "dangerously high" category. At over 450, my triglycerides were higher than the French opposition to the war in Iraq.

The nurse said, "You're gonna have to lay off the bacon and sausage for breakfast." She didn't know that I was a non-smoking, non-drinking vegetarian who exercised four or five days a week. My doctor wanted to start me on Lipitor right away. I asked him, "Isn't that the drug where you have to get your liver enzymes checked every three months?"

A number of my friends are taking the lipid-lowering drugs. They berated me for my "hippy naturalist" approach to this pre-CCU problem of mine. I refused the prescription for two reasons. First, I can't seem to comply with a ten-day run of antibiotics, much less a lifetime of daily medications. Second, I'd prefer to have my ticket punched by an MI as opposed to a horrendously yellow demise from liver failure.

What do you do when a problem or impending problem comes up in your organization, and you don't like the recommended solution? I tend to kick into research mode. How can I lower my risk without trashing my vital organs? I looked on the Internet, and called friends who'd lowered their lipids without pharmaceuticals. I found out that if you drop the tonnage (I was 216 when this started), things can get better. I found out that if I continued to eat transfats (French fries, croissants, chocolate chip cookies and margarine), things would only get worse.

Many of you have stopped me at conferences and asked about my cholesterol. You have no idea how your support and my public accountability helped me make the changes I needed to make. I'm grateful to each and every one of you for that.

This morning, Sharon, the occupational nurse at MEDIC in Charlotte, North Carolina, lanced my finger, sucked out some blood and put it in her magic machine. My total cholesterol is 172, and my triglycerides are 129! Every once in a while, rejecting expert advice and creating solutions that meet your unique outlook on life works out well. See ya' on the StairMaster.

When he's not exercising and eating right, Mike can be found at www.emsleader.com.

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