



**“IT FELT LIKE SOMEONE WAS SITTING ON MY CHEST.”**

*Bill Elkington  
Mercy Patient*

BILL ELKINGTON, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY MANAGEMENT AT ROCKWELL COLLINS, IS BACK AT WORK AFTER HAVING A HEART ATTACK LAST JUNE. HE'S SHOWN HERE WITH THE CONCEPT FLIGHT DECK, A SIMULATOR USED FOR TESTING NEW FLIGHT DECK INNOVATIONS.



Cam Campbell, MD  
Medical Director  
Mercy Cardiovascular Services

# SAVING TIME, SAVING LIVES

The first symptoms didn't fit the stereotypical heart attack. Instead of the distinct chest pain often associated with heart attacks, Bill Elkington's first sign that something wasn't right began in his arms.

“They began to ache,” he recalls, “and I started feeling odd—slightly nauseated, but not really sick.”

It was June 2. Bill, then 63, was at work at Rockwell Collins.

“I felt like I needed to lie down,” he remembers, “but I thought it would just pass.”

Instead, the aching deepened “until I felt like my arms would explode,” Bill says. He went home and called his wife, Pat, a registered nurse at Mercy.

“She said, ‘I think you're having a heart attack’,” Bill says. She told him to take an aspirin, open the garage door and put his feet up while she called an ambulance.

“In about 10 minutes, the living room was

full of people,” Bill says. Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) asked questions, started an IV and quickly got him into the ambulance.

“All of a sudden, it felt like someone was sitting on my chest,” Bill recalls. “There was no angina leading up to it; it was very peculiar. It was hard to breathe.”

Minutes later, the ambulance doors opened at Mercy's Emergency Department (ED). Bill was greeted by Dr. Cam Campbell, Medical Director of Mercy's Cardiovascular Services and Director of the Mercy Cardiology Clinic.

The Mercy ED and cardiac team worked quickly and efficiently. Catheterization showed three blocked arteries in Bill's heart. Dr. Campbell inserted two stents into one completely blocked

artery. The others, about 95 percent blocked, would require bypass surgery.

From the ambulance's arrival at Mercy until the stents were inserted, only 22 minutes had passed. Bill remained in ICU for two days, then went home and began cardiac rehabilitation.

"It was extraordinary how quickly the team got those stents in," Bill now says. "Just remarkable. Everyone knew exactly what to do."

That critical coordinated system of care for heart attack patients is part of Mercy's outstanding, integrated teamwork. Mercy's response times have beaten the national benchmark of 90 minutes for more than five years—something no other hospital can claim.

"Mercy has been able to beat the national standard with every patient 100 percent of the time, from the time they arrive

Ironically, Bill had stopped his usual exercise regimen about six months before his heart attack "because it was getting harder. I figured I must just be getting old, so I quit."

In Bill's family, only his mother had cardiac trouble—a heart attack when she was in her 50s. She took medication after that, dying in her mid-80s of congestive heart failure.

Genetics plays a large part in heart disease, Dr. Campbell says, so Bill may have been predisposed to heart attack. And his initial symptoms of aching shoulders and arms and mild nausea are not unusual for heart attacks, Dr. Campbell adds. Fortunately, Bill is a nonsmoker, is not diabetic, and has stayed healthy and active.

Dr. Campbell stresses the importance of calling an ambulance for help during a heart attack. That team immediately assesses the patient and notifies Mercy's team.

**"MERCY HAS BEEN ABLE TO BEAT THE NATIONAL STANDARD WITH EVERY PATIENT 100 PERCENT OF THE TIME, FROM THE TIME THEY ARRIVE TO THE TIME WE INSERT THE STENTS."**

*Dr. Cam Campbell, Medical Director, Mercy Cardiovascular Services*

to the time we insert the stents," Dr. Campbell notes. "It's one thing to achieve perfection. It's another to maintain that perfection."

Patients do better, live longer and stay out of emergency rooms more often if that response is well-honed. "That process is very well hardwired into Mercy's protocol," Campbell adds.

In Bill's case, "our concern was to take care of the artery causing the heart attack," Campbell explains. "We needed to allow the heart muscle to recover, which takes about a month to regain normal heart function."

A five-hour bypass surgery on July 9 opened up the other two blocked arteries. Bill remained hospitalized for nine days—longer than usual because fluid build-up around his lungs required additional care. His cardiac rehabilitation, resumed after surgery, continued until early October.

"I still don't have my wind and stamina I used to have," he said in mid-October, "but I can hit my heart rate right on and I exercise regularly."

"Half of the people who have heart attacks die before they get to the hospital," he says. "That can be a 10- to 15-minute heads-up that we have a heart attack patient coming in. The sooner we open the artery, the better things are going to be."

Mercy's performance has won state and national recognition; it's among the top 100 nationally and #1 in Linn County for cardiac care, and #1 in Iowa for heart attack treatment.

"The system works consistently," Dr. Campbell says. "It's due to Mercy's 'double D'—dedication and discipline."

To learn more about Mercy's cardiovascular services, visit [mercy.org/heart](http://mercy.org/heart).

If you're interested in learning more about the Concept Flight Deck at Rockwell Collins, check out this CNN story at [cnn.com/2014/10/31/travel/future-of-travel-cockpit-technology/index.html](http://cnn.com/2014/10/31/travel/future-of-travel-cockpit-technology/index.html).