Heart Arrhythmia

Rhythms of the heart.

Welcome to SBH Bronx Health Talk. Arrhythmia occurs when the electrical impulses that coordinate your heart don't work properly. This could cause your heart to be too fast, to slow or in an irregular fashion. A racing heart my affect your life style, it may be life threatening.

With us today to discuss heart arrhythmia is Dr. Salim Baghdadi, electrophysiologist at SBH Health System. Welcome Dr.Baghdadi.

Good morning. Welcome everyone

So, let's start out, in laymen's terms, when we talk about heart rhythms, what are we talking about?

We're talking about the way the heart beats. Usually the heart beats in normal fashion. I describe it to a patient like a rhythm. Any abnormal rhythm is Arrhythmia. So arrhythmia is not the normal rhythm Anthemia could be the heart beating too fast, to slow.

So what is the normal heart beat?

So normal heart beat. It's a big term, normal sized rhythm, which means the heart beats sixty to a hundred beats per minute. What that mean is that the heart is beating at a normal rate. It could be sixty beats, or a hundred beats. If a person is happy, excited or doing exercise, the normal heart rate is 100 beats per minute. It depends on the situation to consider normal or abnormal. A lot of times I get people calling me, my heart is 110 or 120, and I'm worrying. When I ask them what are you doing? I was climbing up the stairs. I was running to see a friend. That's a normal way of being a 120 beat per minute. As a matter of fact, that's why people go to the gym, they give you a heart rate when you go on the elliptical or treadmill. You have to put your age in and they give you a heart rate. It depends on situation. However if someone is sitting down and watching TV and they're starting to relax and their heart rate goes to 120 to 150 beats per minute, that's normal. So it's all situation.

As an electrophysiologist, where do you fit in the equation, if you're concerned about your heart rate? If you go to a primary care physician, they will refer you to a cardiologist? Then the cardiologist will refer them to you?

If you suspect any arrhythmia, some people will go to the emergency room, some people will wait it out. They come straight to me, some will go to the cardiologist. Most doctors need a history of the symptoms, and do an EKG, Most people had it done in their life, which is just measuring the heartbeat. We will always need primary care doctors to reassure the patient.

Typically, more people will go for a physical exam to find out they have an irregular heartbeat. They could find out by a physical exam they have an irregular heart beat or they have symptoms?

Ok, any abnormal rhythm a person has, they have symptoms. Some people arrhythmia happens so fast, they will see sudden changes and seek medical attention. Some arthmias is not that bad, and probably a lot of people they have it for a while before going to the doctor, doing an EKG. I think how people

perceive their symptoms varies from person to person. A lot of people go from surgery to EKG's if they have normal EKGs they come to us.

Ok. What are some of the common signs? You talk about shortness of breath.

Ok. The most common arrhythmia, I think related to the heart beat. So the most common presentation, that people come to me is either palpitation, heart racing, dizzy, sometimes you feel like fainting. There a lot symptoms, like for example chest pain, passing out. The most common causes of these symptoms is a blocked artery.

Ok. Other terms that I have heard of before. Like bradycardia, what is that term?

Ok, the doctor uses big words to sound smart. Cardio means heart, and that could mean fast. I'm not a Latin expert, but I think the origin may be Latin. So, fast heartbeat. Brady means slow, cardio is heart, so slow heartbeat. These terms, people of the trade use it. The doctor uses it to explain as a person. So a professional athlete who exercises five days a week or a professional athlete who has a heart rate of 130 compared to normal person with a heart rate in the thirties, they're feeling out of breath. Meanwhile, a person who is a runner with a heart rate in the thirties, that is normal for them. It's considered the term itself, it doesn't mean the heart has a disease, it means how the heart is doing.

So another term I heard of is A Fib or Atrial Fibrillation. Explain that.

A Fib, actually is a very common disease. It is estimated that people in their eighties have a twenty percent of this rhythm. It's a very common disease, you see it in young people and old people. Atrial Fibrillation is the heart beating irregularly. If you look at the doctors notes and see irregular heartbeat that is Atrial Fibrillation. Atrial Fibrillation is a very common disease, it is very important to know about it. There is a side that is symptomatic. As I mentioned before the palpitations, the dizziness, the short breath when you walk and the tiredness. Those are all at high risk for stroke. So, a lot time's treatment of the disease, and you want to treat the symptoms to prevent stroke, which is a very simple thing to do by taking a blood thinner. We give it to our patients. For almost every person who has this irregular heartbeat, by giving them a blood thinner is to prevent them from having a stroke and possibly treat them for their symptoms.

Ok. Now this tricky fibrillation is like a widow maker. That's deadly.

One of the worst arrhythmia a person could have and it has to be dealt with right away, and usually it's deadly. However, we could find the patient that is at high risk for it, and we do have a treatment. Usually, the cause of death, most people are attributed to be a heart attack. Most people the way they die suddenly is from arrhythmia. So here at Barnabas, people who are at high risk for Atrial Fibrillation, they come here for a variety of reasons. Most people with a big heart, and we give them a fibrillator after treatment. So atrial fibrillation people that we know are resuscitated, they come in some time later because the minute they have one episode, the chances of having another episode is very high. Actually, I could mention a lot of patients of mine, actually a story that happened. Actually, I started working at Barnabas in 2016, when I saw a young person sleeping, his wife next to him. I noticed that he was breathing abnormally. So she called the EMS, and 911, and 911 was instructed to do CPR, wasn't responsive. He was in the hospital ten days, he needed to have a breathing tube, and the permanent breathing tube had to be taken out. Finally, when he got better, he was like thirty-six years old. Suddenly, he went back to normal breathing. The reason I'm bringing up the story, is that people follow

up with us on a normal basis. We do have a lot to help our patients, now he's a working person, selling clams on Arthur Avenue. Ok, usually the most common

That's a great story. Are there certain medical conditions that makes them more susceptible?

Ok, usually what we call coronary disease. It's the most common disease. Usually, what we call it is blocked artery. Usually with blocked artery they have arrhythmia. With blocked artery, the heart doesn't get enough blood. The area that does not get enough blood and oxygen. The other cause is hypertension. People that drink alcohol a lot and a weak heart. We usually treat them with medicine. Al lot of people with weak hearts, you treat them like you treat someone with high blood pressure. The heart could get better, and the patient won't need any further treatment. However, some people need it.

I guess before the treatment, there is a battery of tests.

Of course. It doesn't matter if its heart disease or kidney disease, you need to make the diagnosis. You have to make the diagnosis before the treatment, and when you make the diagnosis, the treatment is easy. As I said, the most valuable test is the EKG, which could be done anywhere and cost a lot and to see if the heart functions, we could use ultrasound, which is a very safe test. Some people have a stress test and cardiac cauterization. So these are the tests we should do, and it's all available here in our hospital. Again, all we try to do is use the medication first, and if they need the procedure we'll offer to them.

Ok one thing we did not talk about are pacemakers. That's something that is very common. We all know someone that has a pacemaker. Tell us about that.

Ok. A pacemaker is very common. You get a lot of people who have it. The case for a pacemaker technically is a slow heartbeat. Usually the heart is not beating enough or fast enough. Remember a normal heart is 60 to 100. So you need to 60 beats to do your daily activities. However, when people have this they feel very tired when they have a slow heartbeat, very weak and sometimes passing out. A slow heartbeat could be permanent and could be occasional and a lot of times if they are wearing an EKG monitor for 24 hours and we could see if the heart doesn't beat for two to three seconds or four to five seconds. If the heart doesn't beat for four to five seconds they could dizzy and faint. Those people, we do offer a pacemaker. A pacemaker is a simple device. A pacemaker is a simple device that is attached to a battery and attached to wire. The wire goes inside the heart and the monitor. If the heart goes below 60, we want to make the heart beat faster than that. It's a very simple procedure, it's takes two hours to get done. It's a lifesaving treatment for the person who needs it.

I know the manager of the Yankees had a pacemaker implanted. A month or two ago during Spring training, and he's a young active guy. It's not just older people who need pacemakers.

I had a patient who had it implanted as young as thirty years old. I implanted in a younger person about 22 years old. Some people born very young with a heart problem need a pacemaker as young as day one. Disease doesn't know age Steve.

A pacemaker could last how long?

Ok. All the devices I implant depends on the usage. Ok. So people who need a pacemaker for their heart that stops five seconds a day. People whose heart doesn't beat at all. So they need it 24/7. Most

companies give you an average of ten years for the battery to be changed. Most devices last seven to twelve years. The average nine years. Again, it depends how much the person uses it. It depends on how much energy is needed to beat the heart. So on average to be on the lower side seven years, the higher side eleven years. It becomes part of the body they live with it and they don't even know.

My mother in law is ninety four years old, she had a pacemaker put in the last year of so. She has a lot of more energy then she had before, she could do a lot more with it cognitively.

Dr.Baghdadi, thank you for a few minutes today. I know you have to get back to work.

Thank you so much. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk to you.