

Sunday Profile /Aaron Hirsch

Son takes dad's care to heart

By Louise Continelli NEWS STAFF REPORTER
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He was on a mission to save his dad. Aaron Hirsch was finishing his last year of UB's Pharmacy School when his 44-year-old father suffered a massive heart attack.

Allen Hirsch survived but immediately underwent bypass surgery. Within one month, he began to get chest pains, shortness of breath and extreme fatigue. Doctors placed seven stents to reopen blocked arteries, the most stents, they said, placed in any one person at the time. But the next day, Allen had another heart attack in the hospital.

Suffering constant chest pain and weakness, Allen was told there were no other options for him. He'd have to lead a very sedentary lifestyle, curtail his activities and never overexert himself because another heart attack could kill him.

"Well, at 44 years old, this was not an acceptable solution for my father," recalls Aaron, who brought a last-resort option heart-saving technology to the Buffalo area. "It was crazy."

After years of debilitating angina pain and "a significantly limited quality of life," an appointment was made at the Cleveland Clinic for a second opinion. Doctors there concurred that his father was no longer a surgical candidate and that another heart attack would probably be fatal.

"They said he may live several more years as long as he didn't overdo it," Aaron Hirsch remembers hearing.

"The day after the testing, a doctor came to his hospital room and said that there's one other option at the time that was fairly new and he could try as a last resort."

His father agreed to try a noninvasive treatment, using pressure-cuffs around his legs, that painlessly inflated in sequence with his heart beat, increasing the blood flow to the arteries into the heart.



Robert Kirkham/Buffalo News
Aaron Hirsch, left, stands by his father, Allen, whose health saga has inspired his son to widen care opportunities for others with similar heart problems.

Today, 14 years after that first heart attack, Allen is doing well, and working out at the Buffalo Athletic Club.

At the time, his father was driving about 160 miles round trip to Rochester to get the treatment at the closest center offering it. Allen drove to the center every day for the full course of therapy.

“I spoke to him every day after his treatment and became very interested when he started telling me how much better he felt after only the 10th treatment. I began going with him to treatments,” said Aaron.

That’s when Aaron looked into the possibility of bringing treatment— called enhanced external counterpulsation, or EECP — to the Buffalo area.

So Aaron set up a VascuFlo EECP Heart Centers clinic in Amherst. VascuFlo now has four locations throughout Western New York, and recently added a mobile system to better serve patients who can’t travel.

It has helped his father and over 600 people here “living with heart disease regain hope and improve their quality of life,” he said.

Have an idea about a local person whose life would make a good profile or a neighborhood issue worth exploring?

E-mail lcontinelli@buffnews.com

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, P. O. Box 100, Buffalo, NY 14240