

# Telemonitoring a shared experience for Georgia couple

*The patient names in this story have been changed to protect the identity of the beneficiaries.*

A Georgia couple is doubly grateful for the SunCrest Healthcare telemonitoring program for heart failure patients. Victor and May Stephens, who have been married 45 years, began sharing a telemonitor in October. They agree it's been invaluable.

"It's one of best experiences we've ever had," said Victor. "It makes us feel safer. It's like having a nurse in the house."

"It's a Godsend," said May.

Victor's heart problems began in 2005, when the 72-year-old retired high school math teacher suffered a heart attack. Since then, he's been hospitalized twice, once for a catheter ablation and another time this past summer to repair three aneurisms.

May's heart problems only became obvious last year after the 69-year-old retired high school guidance counselor underwent a successful knee replacement surgery in March. Then Victor returned to the hospital for eight days. The time May spent by his bedside took its toll. She turned out to have a blockage in the heart and had to have a stent placed in an artery.

May was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and, like her husband, became a candidate for the telemonitoring program.

A home health nurse set up the telemonitor and showed them how to use it, said Victor.

"It's so simple a 10 year old could use it," said May, who weighs herself every morning and night and enters the results in the telemonitor.

If she gains three pounds overnight, that's her signal that fluid is building up and that she must seek treatment, she said.

Their home health nurse said she works closely with May to help her restrict her fluid and sodium intake. The nurse also helped May fine tune her blood pressure medication with the aid of the telemonitor. When May consistently recorded low heart rate and blood pressure readings, the nurse realized something was amiss.

The nurse asked May to delay taking her medication until after she had taken her blood pressure reading, so the nurse could see the medicine's effect. May complied, and the nurse realized her patient's blood pressure was better without medication. The nurse contacted May's doctor, who reduced the dosage.

While Victor is more interested in gaining weight than maintaining it, he, too, must watch his blood pressure. He recently received a call from their nurse when it rose due to stress, but the nurse said the Stephens tend to call her before she can call them.

"The Stephens are very aware of what's going on," said their nurse. "The telemonitor has helped them to know their bodies and to know where their readings should and shouldn't be."

"They're very gracious, patient and knowledgeable," said Victor of the SunCrest home health team.

Now that May feels better, Victor sleeps better at night. When his wife first got home from the hospital, she fell almost every day because of fluid retention, resulting in numerous calls to 911, he said.

“I would worry about her getting up to go to the bathroom at night,” he said. “I couldn’t sleep for worrying about her, but now I don’t worry.”

With his mind at ease, Victor is concentrating on gaining his strength back. When he first got out of the hospital, he could only lift 10 pounds, and he could barely make it to the mailbox. Now he enjoys doing all the things he took for granted.

“Now I can do what I want to do, and I enjoy every minute of life,” he said. “The least little thing is pleasurable.” If they can help it, the Stephens have no intention of going back in the hospital.

“The hospital is great if you really need it, but I don’t want to have to need it,” said Victor. His wife agreed.

“We can stay home and let other people go who really need to be there.”