

Forty minutes to save a life

Barrie RN leaves cardiac patient and mother of three thankful to be alive.

BY HELENA MONCRIEFF

It is not unusual for RNs to encourage patients in distress to hang on and keep fighting. But last spring, the tables were turned when, one extraordinary morning at Barrie's Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH), cardiac patient Diana Rogler signalled her support and encouragement to emergency nurse and RNAO member Terri Reid as she pumped her way through an unprecedented 40 minutes of cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Rogler says she owes her life to Reid and will never forget the day she and her husband, who works at RVH, were on the 15-minute drive to the hospital when severe chest pains suddenly hit.

"I don't remember going into triage," Rogler says "but I walked into the emerg and layed down on a stretcher. The nurse did an ECG right away. I remember thinking 'what's going on?' Then I looked at my husband and said 'I'm going to pass out.'"

She did, and Reid was called over.

"We grabbed the cart and I took over the CPR," the 43-year-old RN remembers. Hospital protocol calls for 'fast and hard' compressions, which can be exhausting. Three other nurses pitched in, but only Reid was able to keep a good pulse. "It was decided, I'm it," she recalls.

Forty minutes is almost double the usual time allotted to perform CPR, but Reid and her colleagues knew this was no ordinary case. Rogler was just 42, a mother of three, and she had no history of heart trouble. But perhaps more remarkable was the fact that as the team continued its work, their patient appeared to be watching them. They knew they couldn't give up.

"Her eyes were open and she had purposeful movement," Reid recounts. "With each compression I did, there was a 'huhh' sound. I was hurting her. Every so often she just reached up and held my arm, as if to tell me 'I'm still here. Just keep fighting, keep going.'"

Rogler can only speculate on what she was signalling. "I don't know in what context (I reached for her arm). Probably 'this hurts like hell but don't stop. It's OK... I



Diana Rogler (left) made a special trip back to Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie to thank RN Terri Reid for her life-saving measures.

know you're doing what you have to."

Whatever she meant, it was a motivator for Reid. "The adrenaline was just rushing. You don't think of how tired you are; you are so consumed by the moment."

"We just kept pumping her with meds and kept defibrillating her heart," she continues. "For the sixth defibrillation at the 40-minute mark, we turned her on her side, put one (paddle) on front and one on back and got a heart rate. It was a huge relief. I thought 'Oh my God, we did it.'" But there wasn't time to celebrate. The physician did a quick ultrasound, looked up and said: "Get her out of here now."

That's when Rogler's memory kicks back in. "When I woke up, I was in the ambulance and came to enough for them to tell me I was on my way to Southlake (Regional Health Centre in Newmarket)."

The caring face she saw was Reid's.

Once there, Rogler was whisked into the cardiac catheterization lab with Reid and the RVH team watching from the nursing station. They discovered a dissecting left anterior descending (LAD) artery, a rare condition with a high mortality rate. There wasn't time to move her to an operating room. It was a few days later when Rogler says the reality hit. Not knowing how much she would remember, her husband had sheltered her from the details of her ordeal until she was strong enough to absorb them. "He said, 'I've got a story for you.'"

Rogler was amazed when she discovered what Reid and the RVH team had done. She likened the experience to finding out there was a bad storm while she was sleeping. "You are like 'huh?' I don't even know what happened." She spent the next days piecing together the events and recovering. "The worst pain was my chest," she says. Many ribs had been cracked by Reid's stellar technique, but there was no opportunity to complain. "If you think you are sore," one of her Southlake nurses told her, "go see the lady who did CPR on you. She'll be worse."

Rogler did, indeed, see her lifesaver just a few weeks later. But she kept the hugs gentle. "She's just a powerhouse," Rogler says of Reid. "Everyone did an awesome job but she had the greatest impact."

"There are only so many words you can say for something like that," she adds of their emotional meeting. "Thank you."

In September, Rogler was back at work as a part-time dental hygienist. She finished her cardio rehabilitation program early in December. **RN**

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