

## Heart Disease Hits Home with Cardiac Nurse Practitioner

February, 2007

February is American Heart Month.

The number one reason, as cited by the American Heart Association, for delayed treatment of a heart attack is denial. Lynn Kincanon, nurse practitioner at Heart Center of the Rockies sees this every day at the office, but in recent months she has also witnessed denial with her own family.

Kincanon has two brothers and a father with heart disease. Lynn's older brothers only symptom was what they call cardiac sweat. Large droplets of sweat rolling off of him. No discomfort at all, just a vague sense of uneasiness. He was out to dinner with a firefighter who knew that sign, and brought him to the local ER. If it was not for his friend, he would have never sought treatment. Lynn's younger brother, on the day before his 47th birthday, spent many hours at home denying the fact that he was having a heart attack, and yet he had the typical symptoms of a heart attack.

“One of the biggest hurdles in medicine is getting people to be aware of the signs and the symptoms of heart disease,” says Kincanon. “My experience for over 20 years in the care of heart patients is that they delay at least 4 hours before seeking emergency treatment; which many times causes their heart to be weakened for the rest of their life, or worse, it may cost them their life.”

February is best known for Valentine's Day, but the staff at Heart Center of the Rockies would like the community to remember February is also American Heart Month. It's one month a year that individuals should take an honest look at their risk for heart disease, schedule a screening, and review the symptoms of a heart attack.

Knowing the common symptoms for a heart attack are as important as knowing that symptoms vary among individuals AND between men and women. Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, others start slowly with mild discomfort.

The most common symptoms include:

- **Chest “discomfort”.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It is often described as an uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain, or like someone or something sitting on the chest.
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** The discomfort can radiate from the chest to include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, or jaw. Sometimes the pain can be in these areas alone.
- **Shortness of breath.** May occur with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other signs:** These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness or dizziness.

Women don't always have the chest pain that men do and instead might experience the more mild symptoms including shortness of breath, nausea or back pain – making it even harder to diagnosis. If you think you or a loved one is having a heart attack, call 9-1-1, DON'T go to a doctor's office.

“Remember to know the signs, know your own personal risk and act quickly to save your life,” says Kincanon. “Every second counts when it is your beating heart muscle that is at risk.”

To download a copy of heart attack symptoms, visit [www.heartcenteroftherockies](http://www.heartcenteroftherockies). To schedule a heart health screening, call (970) 221-1000.