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Heart & Stroke Hero Announcement

August 2010

The American Heart Association/American Stroke Association is proud to announce its 2010 Heart & Stroke Heroes. This award program has reached its 16th year and we have some amazing award winners! Every year our nominating committee, comprised of a diverse group representing the local health care systems and past honorees, reads through numerous nomination forms. They have the difficult task of choosing and announcing the award recipients. This year was especially difficult and we are excited to announce our selections.

Heart & Stroke Heroes will be recognized at two events. ***The Heart & Stroke Gala Patron Party will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 pm on Wednesday, September 1 at the W Hotel - The Foshay in Minneapolis.*** Honorees will each have a few minutes to tell their story and thank their nominator. ***The Heart & Stroke Gala will be held from 5:30 pm to Midnight on Saturday, October 16 at the Minneapolis Convention Center.*** At this event honorees will receive their official award on stage in front of over 800 guests.

Each Heart & Stroke Hero will receive two complimentary tickets to each event. Their nominator will receive two tickets as well.

Heart & Stroke Hero - Physician Researcher Category

Gary Francis, M.D.

Director, Heart Failure Program & Associate Director, Lillehei Clinical Trials Center

Nominated by: Daniel J. Garry, M.D., Ph.D.

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, Dr. Francis completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Minnesota and received his M.D. from Creighton University, where he was a member of the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society. Following additional training in Chicago, Illinois, San Diego, California, and the U.S. Navy, he returned to the University of Minnesota and worked in Dr. Jay Cohn's laboratory studying heart failure. Dr. Francis was recruited by the Cleveland Clinic in 1997, where he was first appointed director of the coronary intensive-care unit, and, later, head of clinical cardiology. In 2008, Dr. Francis returned to the University of Minnesota.

Over the past 35 years, Gary Francis has had an exemplary career as a clinician scientist. He is a luminary for the faculty and is clearly a triple threat. Dr. Francis has an international reputation as one of the primary leaders in the field of heart failure. He has been listed in "Best Doctors of America" every year since its inception in the mid-1990's. He served as president of the Heart Failure Society of America from 2004-2006 and is currently a writing member of the American Board of Internal Medicine in the subspecialty of heart failure and transplantation. His long-standing research efforts focused on novel therapies for heart failure have been recognized through his leadership and participation in two National Institutes of Health/Specialized Centers of Clinically Oriented Research awards.

No other faculty member within the Cardiovascular Division is more respected by his peer faculty members or trainees for his integrity and his commitment to education. He is generous with his time and efforts, supportive of fellows and faculty members at the University of Minnesota, and is an outstanding communicator sharing his sense of humor with trainees, colleagues, staff and patients. He lives and models a life of excellence—refusing to provide nothing but the finest education, research and patient care at the University. Dr. Francis has transformed cardiovascular care for the state of Minnesota. He inspires those around him to make an impact in cardiovascular medicine.



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Heart & Stroke Hero - Health Care Provider Category

Barbara Unger, R.N., B.S., FAACVPR

Program Director, Level 1 Heart Attack System, Director, Emergency Cardiac Systems

Nominated by: Patty Peterson

Barb Unger not only helped to create the Level 1 Cardiac response at the Minneapolis Heart Institute and Abbott Northwestern, but also helped to implement it. As a result, patient survival ratios have greatly improved, She also conducts training on the Level 1 system and has consulted hospitals around the country on cardiac care.

Barb has a long list of honors and awards which include Itasca County Person of the Year, Carol Huttner Award in Nursing (2006), Hero in Healthcare Award (2007) and HealthPartners Innovation in Healthcare Award (2008). She has received these awards because of her strong commitment to her cardiac patients. She has worked with over 20 emergency medical system services within the state, developed response mechanisms, expedited transfers and is constantly evaluating systems in place.

Barb's patients are of the utmost importance to her and to see these patients live their lives after a heart or aortic event makes her smile—and this is a smile you won't forget. She doesn't always take credit for the life-saving changes she helped make, but her colleagues insist that it is Barb's vision and follow through that is the driving force behind so many important advances in cardiac care.

Heart & Stroke Hero - Survivor Category

Naomi Atrubin, heart survivor

Nominated by: Kathy Zarling, MS, RN, CNS

Naomi Atrubin is a woman who talks the talk and walks the walk. She has been a tireless volunteer for much of her life for the American Heart Association, the Rochester Heart Board, The Rochester Coronary Club Board, the WomenHeart Coalition. She sits on Mayo Clinic's Internal Review Board, and she is one of the founding members of a new council at Mayo Clinic, the Patient-Family Advisory Council. Very involved in her community, Naomi is as an active member at her local Synagogue and she visits prisoners at the Federal Medical Center located in Rochester, Minn. on a monthly basis. These prisoners usually have no family or friends visiting, so Naomi considers this a very important commitment.

In 1975, Naomi's brother, a cardiologist, died of a sudden heart attack at age 50. This motivated Naomi to become a member and began serving on The Rochester Coronary Club Board in 1981. Then, after suffering her first heart attack, she became a Board member of the Rochester Coronary Club. She survived her second heart attack five years later and she has continued her commitment to her community ever since. She will soon celebrate her 80th birthday on October 19th, 2010. Naomi exercises daily. She eats a healthy diet and encourages her family, friends, and those she speaks with to do the same. She continually strives to participate in more heart-healthy activities, promote lifestyle change and to be involved in the Rochester community and "spreading the word" about heart disease prevention.

As stated by her nominator, Kathy Zarling, "Naomi's number one commitment is to stay fit and be healthy! She strives to improve on all she does and at 80 years old in October she will continue to be a positive, educated, and influential role model for all those around her."