Meet an Ambassador

DARIEN – DANCING THROUGH HEART FAILURE

At 72 years young, Darien is dancing “like no one’s watching.”

HeartMate LVAD™ Ambassador
Darien has been an active person as far back as she can remember.

In college, she minored in physical education. She taught business at the college level for 35 years, and for several years, led the Boise State University Business Professionals of America – student chapter.

As active and busy as Darien was, receiving a diagnosis of heart failure was a real shock. Nevertheless, she was determined to keep moving.

Darien started line dancing in 2009 and fell in love with it. Though, as her symptoms grew, her stamina and quality of life diminished. 20 years of worsening heart failure symptoms were taking their toll.

So in 2016 when the option of an LVAD was raised and she learned it may be possible to regain her quality of life, she was on board. “It’s so strange to recall – back then I didn’t think I was doing too badly,” said Darien. “But now where I am today – and how great I feel – I know the HeartMate LVAD changed my life.”

One of Darien’s biggest joys continues to be dance, and with the HeartMate LVAD, she’s dancing up to three days a week. “It’s a combination of classes that total two and a half hours,” she said. She admits that some days she doesn’t stay the whole time. “I dance as long as I can because I love it.”

When she’s not dancing, Darien plays in three different card groups, lunches with friends, travels and attends two support group meetings each month.

Her Boise-area support group, affectionately referred to as “Pie Night,” meets monthly at a local restaurant. In addition, as her own caregiver, Darien attends the caregiver’s support group.

“I’m the only one there who is single,” she said, “but I feel it’s important since I live alone and do my own dressing changes.”

Darien also has friends who check on her daily via text message.

Some have called her an inspiration, but she doesn’t think so. “I choose to live the best that I can and for as long as I can.”

Darien’s best piece of advice: “Don’t let this control your life.”

Each testimonial relates an account of an individual’s response to the treatment. The patient’s account is genuine, typical and documented. However, it does not provide any indication, guide, warranty or guarantee as to the response other persons may have to the treatment. Responses to the treatment discussed can and do vary and are specific to the individual patient. See Important Safety Information referenced within.
Share Your Story

A STORY SHARED, A FRIEND GAINED

We often hear from our Ambassadors about the wonderful experiences they have when sharing their stories. Whether it’s someone considering LVAD therapy for themselves, or a room full of health care professionals, the value of sharing your first-hand LVAD experience is priceless to the listener. And – you never know who you’re going to meet.

Sue S. and Dee M. were asked by their cardiologists to speak at an upcoming event. They both believed in the importance of sharing their LVAD therapy stories with medical professionals, so they agreed.

They didn’t know each other before the event, but the two LVAD recipients immediately recognized they were on a similar journey.

“We definitely noticed each other during the cocktail hour,” said Dee. “We spent the night talking - even our husbands had a lot to talk about. I gave her hints on what has worked for me and she gave me hints on what has worked for her.”

“We check in with each other regularly and I think we’ve taught each other a lot,” said Sue. In fact, Dee recommended a backpack and now Sue loves it too.

Besides having an incredible opportunity to educate the cardiologists about life as an LVAD recipient, one of the best things that happened that day was the start of a new friendship. “I’m grateful that I took the opportunity to share my story that day because it brought Dee and I together,” said Sue.

Do you have an LVAD BFF? Tell us about how you met at HeartMateAmbassador@abbott.com.

Support Groups

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTION

Support groups can be social for many who attend, providing an opportunity to share a problem and discuss a solution among a group who likely has had a similar experience. Support groups can also be sources of hope for individuals who may not have realized that their experiences are not as unique as they thought.

According to Harvard Health Publishing, a growing body of research places social support right up there with cholesterol control and exercise as offering protection to the heart. It’s hard to quantify for certain, but there is a belief that support of others and ongoing education contributes to longevity and healthy living.

The best way to find out if a support group is right for you is to give it a try. Ask yourself if you’re comfortable there. Do you come away feeling energized or relieved? Did you feel seen and heard? Did you learn something new about yourself or your condition? Did something you shared offer hope to someone else?
Earlier this past summer, HeartMate LVAD Ambassadors and friends David V. and Charlie L. sponsored a hole in a golf tournament that was supporting the nursing program at the hospital that performed both of their LVAD surgeries. As a surprise to his LVAD brother, David had a photo of each of their Ambassador baseball cards blown up and posted at the hole.

“It gave me such a thrill to surprise my buddy Charlie like that,” Dave said. This golfing Ambassador team is considering taking over the planning of the annual tournament and moving it to a course closer to where they live in upstate New York.

Funny enough, neither seems to agree on who the better golfer is…

Support Groups

**GET MORE FROM YOUR GROUP**

Support groups provide a forum to share experiences, find support, learn something new and be comforted by the knowledge that you and your loves ones are not alone in your journey. Below is a list of ideas to inspire new or different discussion in your support group. Modify them as needed to meet the needs and interests of your group.

**Healthy Eating Pot Luck** – Challenge the group to put their best heart healthy recipes forward by bringing their favorite dish and sharing techniques for staying on track with a low sodium diet.

**Have LVAD, Will Travel** – Leaving home, even just overnight, can be daunting – especially for new LVAD recipients. Ask everyone to write out their top LVAD traveler tips (calling ahead, centers in the area, packing equipment reminders, etc.), and put together a list to share with the group.

**Mental Health Matters** – Invite a psychologist from the hospital to facilitate a discussion about topics that may be impacting your group, such as: sleep issues, adjusting to a new normal, stress management and effective communication.

**Emergency Preparedness** – Work as a group to create a list of 3-5 emergency situations that may occur in your area, such as power outages, natural disasters (hurricane) or accidents. Invite a local emergency expert, such as an EMT or your VAD Team to facilitate a discussion and provide helpful reminders on how best to manage in case of an emergency.

**Walk to Raise Awareness** – Form a support group team for a short walk, even around the hospital, to raise awareness about heart failure while building camaraderie among the group.

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CONNECTING MORE HEARTS™

TO SUBSCRIBE, EMAIL YOUR NAME AND MAILING ADDRESS TO: HEARTMATEAMBASSADOR@ABBOTT.COM

The quarterly HeartMate™ LVAD Community Newsletter is for current or prospective HeartMate LVAD recipients and their caregivers. In it, you will find interviews with HeartMate LVAD Ambassadors, articles on life with an LVAD, caregiver-focused articles, and tips on things like traveling and exercising with an LVAD.

Individual Experience: Each testimonial relates an account of an individual’s response to the treatment. The patient’s account is genuine, typical and documented. However, it does not provide any indication, guide, warranty or guarantee as to the response other persons may have to the treatment. Responses to the treatment discussed can and do vary and are specific to the individual patient.

Important Safety Information

Rx Only

Brief Summary: Prior to using these devices, please review the Instructions For Use for a complete listing of indications, contraindications, warnings, precautions, potential adverse events and directions for use.

HeartMate 3™ LVAS Indications: The HeartMate 3 Left Ventricular Assist System is indicated for providing short- and long-term mechanical circulatory support (e.g., as bridge to transplant or myocardial recovery, or destination therapy) in patients with advanced refractory left ventricular heart failure.

HeartMate II™ LVAS Indications: The HeartMate II Left Ventricular Assist System is indicated for use as a “bridge to transplantation” for cardiac transplant candidates who are at risk of imminent death from non-reversible left ventricle failure. It is also indicated for use in patients with New York Heart Association (NYHA) Class IIIB or IV end-stage left ventricular failure, who have received optimal medical therapy for at least 45 of the last 60 days, and who are not candidates for cardiac transplantation. The HeartMate II Left Ventricular Assist System is intended for use both inside and outside of the hospital, or for transportation of Left Ventricular Assist Device patients via ground ambulance, airplane, or helicopter.

HeartMate 3 and HeartMate II LVAS Contraindications: The HeartMate 3 and HeartMate II Left Ventricular Assist Systems are contraindicated for patients who cannot tolerate, or who are allergic to, anticoagulation therapy.

HeartMate 3 and HeartMate II LVAS Adverse Events: Adverse events that may be associated with the use of the HeartMate 3 or HeartMate II Left Ventricular Assist System include, but are not limited to those listed below: death, bleeding, cardiac arrhythmia, localized infection, right heart failure, respiratory failure, device malfunctions, driveline infection, renal dysfunction, sepsis, stroke, other neurological event (not stroke-related), hepatic dysfunction, psychiatric episode, venous thromboembolism, hypertension, arterial non-central nervous system (CNS), thromboembolism, pericardial fluid collection, pump pocket or pseudo pump pocket infection, myocardial infarction, wound dehiscence, hemolysis (not associated with suspected device thrombosis) and pump thrombosis.

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