

Look for DVT warning signs

Because I write my columns a few weeks in advance, it's impossible to stay current with all the events of life. However, from the evening of May 12 to the morning of May 21, I was a patient at St. Joseph's Medical Center. A new blood clot had apparently formed in my right leg, and parts of the blood clot had broken off and moved to my lungs! Clots in the lungs are known as pulmonary embolisms, and they can be fatal.

A friend of mine called his doctor and asked if pulmonary embolisms were serious. His doctor replied: "The good news is that your friend called from the hospital. Too often the call comes from the morgue!"

So I am most grateful to be writing this article. It feels better than having an article written about me!

The cause of the clots in my lungs was the clot in my leg. This is known as DVT - Deep Vein Thrombosis. What this means is that a clot occurs inside a deep vein, usually located in the calf or the thigh. DVT occurs when the blood clot either partially, or completely, blocks the flow of blood in the vein. Fortunately for me, my vein was only partially blocked.

The statistics on DVTs are startling. Complications from DVT kill up to 200,000 people a year in the U.S. alone - that's more than AIDS and breast cancer combined! Yet, I had never heard of it before I got it.

Allow me to share some information that may help to save your life, or the life of someone you know.

"Deep vein thrombosis often occurs in the lower extremities, leg or calf.

While most victims are 60 years or older, DVT can strike anyone at risk.

The leading medical factors that cause DVT are: injury, immobility, surgery and/or illness that may include cancer, clotting disorders and inflammatory diseases.

Prolonged periods of sitting can slow down the blood flow and lead to blood 'pooling'

or accumulating in the extremities.

Pregnant women are five times more likely than non-pregnant women to develop DVT.

Women taking oral contraceptives or hormone replacement may be at increased risk of DVT.

Symptoms of DVT may include pain, tenderness, swelling or discoloration of the affected area, and skin that is warm to the touch.

Some have almost no symptoms.

A major risk associated with DVT is the development of pulmonary embolisms. PE occurs when a blood clot breaks loose from the wall of a vein and travels to the lungs, blocking the pulmonary artery or one of its branches.

Patients with pulmonary embolisms may experience shortness of breath, an apprehensive feeling, chest pain, rapid pulse, sweating or a bloody cough."

I share this information not to alarm you, but to forewarn you. If you think you have DVT, don't hesitate in getting to the emergency room immediately. With Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski's help, that's what I did.

In the hospital, I was put on heparin, a blood thinner, and I will be on Coumadin (also a blood thinner) for the rest of my life.

In the twinkling of an eye, everything can change. One minute I was feeling fine. The next moment I was gasping for air.

Next week I'll share more of my emotional and spiritual reaction to DVT. But for now I just want to thank all of you for your ongoing prayers. As I've said on the radio: "We all come into life stamped by God: 'Handle with Care.' " Life is fragile. Handle with prayer.