Welcome to our February 2023 newsletter.

February is American Heart Month. A proclamation from the President of the United States, “I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim February 2023 as American Heart Month, and I invite all Americans to participate in National Wear Red Day on February 3, 2023.”

American Heart Month was established by Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1966. Cardiac care has involved significantly since that time. Because of the advances in cardiac care the number of fatalities has been reduced greatly. The annual deaths from cardiovascular diseases have fallen by nearly 1 million per year since the 1960s.

Each of us can take this time to concentrate on our cardiovascular health. Taking care of your heart can be as simple as the ABCS. Talk with your health care team about Aspirin, Blood pressure control, Cholesterol management, and Smoking cessation.

At our January meeting, our speaker was Dr. Foster who shared 10 steps you can take to manage your Afib.

1) Take your medicines as directed and set a reminder if needed. 2) Listen to your body and let your health care team know if you start to feel worse. 3) Make sure you are taking a blood thinner if one has been prescribed to you—even if you feel OK. 4) Adopt heart-healthy habits. 5) Limit or cut out alcohol altogether. 6) Lose weight if needed. 7) Ask to be screened for sleep apnea. 8) Stay connected to activities, people and other things that matter. 9) Manage other conditions. 10) Find your village, those positive people who boost your spirits and will support and advocate for you when needed. JOIN US THIS MONTH FOR OUR MONTHLY MENDED HEARTS SUPPORT MEETING.

Lindell Smith, Chapter President
Happy February, American Heart Month is here! There is no better time to spread awareness of heart disease and its effects on families than during the month of February. Over the next few weeks, Mended Hearts will be acknowledging and highlighting CHD Week (Feb 7-14), Heart Failure Awareness Week (Feb 12-18) and Heart Valve Awareness Day (Feb 22) with a variety of awareness and educational activities and events.

One of the best ways you can help spread heart disease awareness this month among our members is to join us in our February 16th monthly support virtual meeting to hear speakers share their heart disease stories. This will focus on raising awareness of all types of heart disease so that we can show the world that those affected by it can go on to live heart-healthy, full lives that are not defined by their heart event or heart defects.

Join us on zoom Thursday, February 16th at 6:30 PM for our monthly support meeting to hear speakers share their heart disease stories and how they made their comeback through support and heart healthy changes.

Your body's powerhouse: The heart

Located behind the breastbone and in the middle of the rib cage, the heart is the body's most protected organ. This little powerhouse pumps 2,000 gallons of blood through the circulatory system each day by expanding and contracting more than 100,000 times. In the average human lifetime, it beats 2.5 billion times. In fact, since the 1990s, scientists have understood that the heart has a cluster of 40,000 neurons that communicate with parts of the brain and may even be involved in pain, according to Pubmed. This so-called heart brain works with the brain in ways that are still being researched, but even now, it's clear that the body's organs are connected in an intricate system.

We aren't generally aware of the efforts, and struggles, of our heart, but we can do some things to help it keep healthy, according to the American Heart Association. Decide now what your risk factors are and what you can do about them. You can't control your age or family history, but there are risk factors you can control:

* Quit smoking. Smoking is one of the most harmful things you can do to your heart.
* Control your blood pressure and take prescribed medications.
* Manage your weight. Gradual weight loss, followed by a stable healthy weight, can help decrease your risks for cardiovascular complications.
* Eat better. Lots of fruits, vegetables and whole grains combine to make weight loss easier and can help lower cholesterol.
* Get out and about. Brisk walks are great exercise. A combination of vigorous activity, resistance training and flexibility exercise is better. It helps your heart, controls your weight and makes you look and feel good.
* Don't be jaded. You have heard this advice before. Act on it.
American Heart Month: Take extra care during the winter

Everything has a season -- including heart attacks, which are more common during the winter. According to the American Heart Association, even regions with mild climates see spikes in heart attacks during the winter months. As winter continues during American Heart Month, everyone should take stock of their risk factors and lifestyle and take steps to protect themselves. According to Northwestern Medicine, the biggest risk factor is the cold, which causes blood vessels to contract and can raise blood pressure. Meanwhile, the heart works even harder to maintain body temperature. When body temperature falls below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, the resulting hypothermia can also lead to heart damage. By dressing for the weather with coats, hats, gloves and socks, you can also protect your heart. Lifestyle factors can also increase risk. For many, shoveling or walking through snow are more strenuous than their usual activities, and the sudden increase in workload can add additional strain on the heart. Stay home if necessary and don't be afraid to ask for help clearing your sidewalk or driveway.

Cardiology moves forward—In recognition of American Heart Month, here are some cardiovascular research developments to keep an eye on, courtesy of Harvard Health Publishing:

- Digital stethoscopes. Featuring specialized microphones and sensors that filter, buffer, and amplify sounds from the heart, digital stethoscopes then convert the sounds to a digital signal sent wirelessly to a smartphone. There, the patterns can be visualized and further analyzed.

- Safer anti-clotting treatments. A chip the size of a postage stamp contains miniature channels, valves, processors, and pumps that enable precise manipulation of different fluids. The chip can screen hundreds of compounds in a few hours and was developed by Australian scientists who aim to identify better and safer anti-clotting treatments.

- New ways to lower cholesterol. An experimental injectable drug called Inclisiran requires just two injections a year (rather than others that are monthly) and may cut LDL -- the "bad" cholesterol -- in half. Another new drug called bempedoic acid, taken in pill form, can lower LDL by about 25 percent in people who can't tolerate high doses of statins.

- Cuffless blood pressure monitor. The Biobeat device uses a small skin patch to measure light absorbed or reflected by blood vessels; paired with a special smartwatch, it continuously measures a person's heart rate and oxygen level in addition to blood pressure. The patch is placed on the upper torso and lasts for 10 days.

- Handheld ultrasound. Miniaturized ultrasound devices that fit in a doctor's lab coat pocket are plugged into a smartphone or tablet, providing images that can detect problems with the aorta or the heart valves and also determine the severity of heart failure. Though they won't replace standard echocardiograms, the goal is faster diagnosis and treatment of common heart problems.
We recognize member birthdays and surgery dates referred to as Mendiversaries. Congratulations to everyone who is celebrating a heart procedure anniversary this month. If we have your month listed incorrectly or you would prefer not to be listed, please notify the chapter president. If we are missing your celebration, let me know at 256.837.7354.

February Birthdays
Karen Cloe
Angela Griffin
Maureen Nix
Barbara Turner
Laura Mickler Walker

February Mendiversaries
Steve Burcham
Logan Cox
Patricia Doty
Helen Drake
Rebecca Grimes
Bill Oliver

Thanks to all who have renewed their membership. The chapter’s funding depends on renewals and new memberships.

Renew Your Mended Hearts membership or join us. National dues individual $20; family $40
No local dues as chapter receives 25% of national dues paid

To renew over the phone, please call 888-432-7899 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET.

To renew through the mail, print off and fill out the membership form found in this newsletter. It can be mailed to the address for the Mended Hearts Resource Center found on the form.

◆ Please do not mail to Huntsville Hospital Volunteer Office.
Effective January 1, 2021, the Resource Center will process all new memberships (all levels) and all membership renewals.

All chapters will be reimbursed 25% of all paid national dues or renewals of dues.