When Sonia Landy Harrison, 81, of Lakewood visited the emergency department at her local hospital due to stomach pain, she did not expect the whirlwind of events that followed. First her heart started beating erratically, then she passed out and had to be resuscitated in order to keep her heart beating.

It was at that point that Sonia was rushed to Jersey Shore University Medical Center with acute coronary syndrome. She was brought to the cardiac catheterization lab, where Maurice Weiss, M.D., performed an angioplasty and inserted a stent to open the artery and restore blood flow to the heart.

“An angioplasty is a minimally invasive technique in which a balloon catheter is threaded through the artery to open it,” explains Dr. Weiss. “The artery is then kept open with the use of a stent device. In Sonia’s case, time was critical — we needed to open the artery right away.”

JOINING A CLINICAL TRIAL
After her successful angioplasty, Sonia was to be treated with medications to prevent future blood clots. This is where her prior relationship with Dr. Weiss played a part. Dr. Weiss is the local principal investigator for a worldwide clinical trial called TIMI-38, which will compare the effectiveness of two medications given after heart procedures. The medications help prevent blood clots, a risk factor for patients recovering from acute coronary syndrome and angioplasty. Sonia was a good candidate to participate in the study.

For Sonia, the decision to participate was an easy one. “My husband was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in his 30s. As a result, we pursued many innovative and experimental treatment options during the past 40 years,” she says. “We’ve been

JOIN THE BREAKFAST CLUB
In one small study, women ate a breakfast of whole-grain bran flakes with low-fat milk every day for two weeks. Then they skipped breakfast for two weeks. Both their total and “bad” cholesterol levels were higher when they skipped breakfast. They also had lower insulin sensitivity, which raises the risk for type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Vol. 81, No. 2
to all the big hospitals in New York, so it was great to know that Jersey Shore, which is right in our backyard, offers the most current treatments and clinical trials.”

Sonia’s decision was reinforced by the care she received at Jersey Shore. “The team at Jersey Shore takes great care to explain the different options, your rights as a patient, and the implications of a specific research study. But what really stood out to me was their sensitivity. They truly listened and treated me as a whole patient — not just for my heart problem. They really took the time to go over everything with me at Jersey Shore.”

A TEAM APPROACH TO TREATMENT

The angioplasty and clinical trial medications would treat part of her heart disease, but doctors still needed to consider the abnormal heart rhythm that caused Sonia’s heart to stop in the days preceding her angioplasty. Another subspecialist was needed to complete her care team. Luckily for Sonia, the expertise she needed was available at Jersey Shore — the only place to offer the full range of electrophysiology services in the region.

Ihab Girgis, M.D., board certified in electrophysiology, implanted a device near Sonia’s heart known as an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD). Dr. Girgis describes the ICD as similar to a pacemaker. “It is designed to deliver a shock when the heart beats too fast,” says Dr. Girgis. “This, in effect, normalizes the heart rhythm.”

“Dr. Girgis was very comforting,” says Sonia. “It’s obvious all the providers work as a team, and they also worked with my primary care physician, who works outside the hospital.”

Sonia was discharged from Jersey Shore after six days following the two heart procedures, and she sees Dr. Weiss for ongoing treatment. She has resumed her former active lifestyle, spending time with family and driving back and forth to New York City on a regular basis. “I enjoy the theater, ballet, the museums, and all New York has to offer. I’ve been going there for years, and it’s nice to be able to drive there again myself.” — Ryan Younger

ABOUT the DOCTORS

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How can you be sure your heart is getting a good workout? Try to exercise in your target heart range for at least 20 minutes, three to five times a week.

To calculate the range that’s right for you, subtract your age from 220. The result is your maximum heart rate. For example, if you are 40 years old, your maximum heart rate is 180. Your target range is 50 percent to 75 percent of that number, or between 90 and 135 heartbeats per minute.

To see if your heart rate is within your target range, count how many times your heart beats per minute during your workout. Stop during your workout and count your heartbeats:

Find your pulse on your neck, wrist, or the base of your thumb.

Use your watch to count your pulse for 10 seconds. Multiply that number by six.

PUMP UP YOUR ROUTINE FOR HEART HEALTH

Jersey Shore University Medical Center offers the most experienced cardiology team in the region. Cardiologists perform more than 10 times more angioplasty procedures at Jersey Shore than all other hospitals in Monmouth and Ocean counties combined. Learn about Jersey Shore’s heart services by calling 1-800-560-9990.