

## A Marquette physician is a lifesaver

March 24, 2015 | Zach Jay

### Near the conclusion of a Copper Country cross-country ski race, Dr. Bill Short found himself in the right place at the right time

ISHPEMING - On the morning of March 7, his 68th birthday, Jim Pedersen lay dying in the snow.

An avid cross-country skier, Pedersen was about three kilometers from the finish line in the 25-kilometer Great Bear Chase Ski Marathon in Calumet when he suffered a heart attack.

By a twist of luck or fate, trailing Pedersen on the course was Dr. Bill Short, a family practice doctor and **community assistant dean for Michigan State University's College of Human Medicine** at UP Health System - Marquette.



*PHOTO CAPTION: Dr. Bill Short is seen in a sled being pulled by emergency responders on snowmobile March 7, administering CPR to Jim Pedersen, who had a heart attack as he approached the finish line of the 25-kilometer Great Bear Chase Ski Marathon in Calumet. As chance would have it, Short was skiing just behind Pedersen when Pedersen was stricken. (Photo courtesy of Adam Johnson)*

Short came around a hairpin turn in the woods to discover Pedersen, face to the sky, eyes open, not breathing. Removing his skis and gloves and dropping to his knees beside Pedersen, Short touched his fingers to the man's neck, feeling his carotid artery for a pulse.

Nothing.

He told another skier to call 911 and began cardiopulmonary resuscitation - rescue breathing and chest compressions.

So it went for the next 20 to 25 minutes. Short was soon joined at the scene by a woman he didn't know who identified herself as a cardiac nurse. The two took turns continuing CPR. Some time after that, they were joined by Short's colleague Dave Grant, an emergency medicine doctor at UPHS - Marquette. The three spelled each other until a snowmobile arrived pulling a sled. There was only room for Pedersen and Short.

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"Dave looked at me reassuringly, saying, 'You can keep him going for much more time doing what you are doing,'" Short recalled.

The snowmobiler pulled Short - still doing chest compressions - and Pedersen out to the road, where they were met soon afterward by an ambulance.

It was in the ambulance, Short found out later, that paramedic brought Pedersen's pulse back using a defibrillator. He woke up. But his first memory would be the hospital at UPHS - Marquette, where he was transferred from Aspirus Keweenaw Hospital later that day.

The strange thing, for Pedersen, was there was no forewarning the heart attack was coming. A retired special education teacher and administrator from Washburn, Wisconsin, Pedersen is devoted to outdoor recreation. He bicycles in the summer, used to run marathons and has cross-country skied for more than 40 years - in the last 12 of which he said he'd become "very serious." He'd previously skied the 25K Bear Chase three or four times and had done the 50K - two loops around the course - twice. He was probably the best prepared for the race he'd ever been.

"I've logged in, gosh, at least 1,000 kilometers on skis this winter," he said. "The conditions were ideal. We had a good night's sleep, a good dinner up at the school there, the pre-(race) pasta feed. And Saturday morning was great ... I was feeling really good. And I was anticipating a very good race."

The catheterization lab at UPHS - Marquette showed one of Pedersen's heart vessels had narrowed, causing the heart attack. Dr. William Jean, the cardiologist that received Pedersen, put a stent in the vessel to open it back up. The next day, Sunday, Short visited Pedersen at the hospital.

"I really did want to see him," Short said. "I just felt a need, a desire to see him alive, and to shake his hand, and just to see how he was doing."

Of the experience Short wrote, "Seeing life in his face, hearing his voice as his hand reached out to grab mine, is among the most satisfying moments of my life."

Pedersen said once what happened to him had sunk in, his reaction "was one of amazement and gratitude," an overwhelming thankfulness to Short and all who helped him for being alive.

"I was quite humbled by having my life saved like that, and the fact that, how many people walking this earth could have been right behind me skiing that had the skills to save my life?" he said. "That in itself is pretty amazing - a miracle."

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For his part, Short himself is not short on humility. He wants his and Pedersen's story to show others the importance of having CPR training.

Becoming certified in CPR requires fairly straightforward and widely available training, Short said, and with it you just might save a life.

"You really never know. ...If you're of sound mind and body, there's no reason not to, and if you have a loved one that does have heart disease, I'd really encourage you to learn (basic life support skills), because you might be in a situation where you can save somebody that you really care about," he said. "But even to save someone that you don't know from Adam, and all of a sudden here you are in the streets and you're part of a rescue - well, gosh, that's a very gratifying human experience to have, and (you) really feel grateful that you took the time to learn these skills. And to me that's the message."

Knowing CPR allowed Short to keep oxygenated blood flowing through Pedersen's brain even while his heart was stopped.

"You compress the chest at a fairly rapid rate (about 100 compressions per minute), and that allows the blood to go to the brain and keep the brain alive while you're waiting for more definitive treatment," Short said.

And while Short said some people are grossed out by the thought of rescue breathing, chest compressions are now being emphasized as the most important component of CPR, with rescue breathing considered a very helpful albeit not crucial part of the process.

"It just makes sense that if you can do it, do it," he said. "But it shouldn't be a reason to not - so people can just do the chest compressions. So that's the big point about this - just to get those started."

For Pedersen, he hopes his story will show people both the value of CPR training and the importance of staying physically active.

"It's hard to be the center of attention, but ... maybe something good will come out of this" by helping people realize they "can take control of their lives and they can change and reverse a lot of negative things," he said. "...Get out and move, and enjoy life and live a healthier life. There's no guarantees, but I feel quality of life is more important than anything, and your relationships you have with your family and friends."

Now in cardiac rehab back in Wisconsin, and given the "green light" to do some moderate bike riding, Pedersen said his doctors told him he should fully recover.

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"And maybe not be so competitive in the future, but who knows," he laughed.

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*"Seeing life in his face, hearing his voice as his hand reached out to grab mine, is among the most satisfying moments of my life." - Dr. Bill Short*

For information about and to register for the Community CPR course taught by UPHS - Marquette's School of EMT, call 225-7590.

For more information on American Red Cross CPR training in the Marquette area, visit [www.redcross.org/take-a-class](http://www.redcross.org/take-a-class). To learn about CPR training offered through Northern Michigan University, visit [www.nmu.edu/sports/recsports/node/128](http://www.nmu.edu/sports/recsports/node/128).