**Bristol Hospital Spotlight:**

**Code Red: Know The Symptoms Of Heart Disease**

February is American Heart Month which is designated to raise awareness about heart disease. In this week’s edition of Bristol Hospital Spotlight, Liran Blum, MD—who last summer joined the Bristol Hospital Multi-Specialty Group and its Division of Cardiology—discusses the risk factors for heart disease as well as the types and symptoms of heart disease.

The Bristol Hospital Multi-Specialty Group Division of Cardiology is located at 22 Pine Street in Bristol. In addition to Dr. Blum, the practice includes cardiologists Michael Whaley, MD; Joseph E. Marakovits, MD; Robert DeBiase, MD and Fawad Kazi, MD. Dr. Blum comes to Bristol Hospital from Williamsport Regional Medical Center—Heart and Vascular Institute, in affiliation with Cleveland Clinic where he served as assistant clinical professor and clinical non-invasive cardiologist. He had previously completed his fellowship in cardiovascular diseases at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine Montefiore Medical Center/Bronx Lebanon Hospital Center, where he also served as chief fellow of clinical cardiology. Dr. Blum completed his internal medicine residency at Albert Einstein College of Medicine Montefiore Medical Center. He received his medical degree from Sackler School of Medicine and his bachelor’s degree from Emory University. Dr. Blum is board-certified in cardiovascular medicine, internal medicine, echocardiography, nuclear cardiology and he is a registered physician of vascular interpretation (RPVI).

Q: What are the risk factors for heart disease/cardiovascular disease?
Dr. Blum: The major risk factors for heart disease are smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity, obesity and diabetes. Unfortunately heart disease also has a genetic predisposition. Simply put: prevention is key—it is much easier to prevent heart disease than it is to treat heart disease.

Q: How does high blood pressure contribute to heart disease?
Dr. Blum: The heart pumps blood through a network of arteries, veins and capillaries. The moving blood pushes against the arterial walls and this force is measured as blood pressure. High blood pressure usually results from the tightening or hardening of very small arteries that regulate the blood flow through the body. As these arteries tighten or harden, the heart has to work harder to pump blood through those vessels.

Q: How can high blood pressure be detected and controlled?
Dr. Blum: High blood pressure is dangerous because it usually does not cause symptoms until it has reached more advanced stages. Annual physical exams are therefore important in detecting and/or monitoring high blood pressure. High blood pressure can be controlled by eating a low salt diet, losing weight and beginning a regular exercise program. Additionally, learning to manage stress and avoiding smoking can help. Medications also are available if these lifestyle changes do not help control your blood pressure.

Q: What is cholesterol?
Dr. Blum: Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance used by the body to build cell walls and for making several essential hormones. The liver produces cholesterol and you absorb it from the animal fats you eat. Particles called lipoproteins carry cholesterol in blood throughout the body and transport cholesterol out of the body into the liver. When cholesterol levels are high, the arteries may get clogged thereby affecting bloodflow.

Q: What are the most common types of heart disease?
Dr. Blum: The term heart disease describes many different conditions. The most common form of heart disease is known as coronary artery disease (CAD), or ischemic heart disease (IHD). These conditions result from plaque accumulation within the arteries of the heart, which reduces blood flow to the heart and increases the risk of a heart attack and other heart complications. Other forms of heart disease include irregular heartbeats also known as arrhythmias; a weak heart muscle also known as cardiomyopathy or heart failure and heart valve problems.

Q: What are the symptoms of CAD or IHD?
Dr. Blum: You should see your doctor immediately if you experience chest pain or shortness of breath, especially if these symptoms occur with activity. However, some patients (such as women and the elderly) may present with atypical symptoms or even have no significant symptoms.

Q: What are the signs of a heart attack?
Dr. Blum: A heart attack occurs when the blood flow that brings oxygen to the heart is severely reduced or cut off completely. The most common symptoms include chest pain or discomfort that may feel like a pressure, squeezing, tightness in the chest. Other symptoms include discomfort that may radiate to your arm, or jaw; shortness of breath; breaking out in a cold sweat; and/or lightheadedness. I cannot stress enough that time matters; if you think that you or someone you’re with is having a heart attack, call 911 immediately.

Q: What is the Bernie Guida Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation Center?
Dr. Blum: All the cardiologists here in our practice work closely with the team from the Bernie Guida Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation Center which was renovated in 2014. The center is located on Level C of Bristol Hospital; it’s about 3,000-square-feet and includes treadmills and stationary bikes. Additionally, the center is part of Bristol Hospital’s Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program which is designed to help patients reach their highest level of wellness through exercise training, counseling and support following a heart attack or open heart surgery. Those who are at a high risk for heart disease also are referred by their physician to the center.

For more information or an appointment with Dr. Blum, please call the Bristol Hospital Multi-Specialty Group Division of Cardiology, 860.582.3235 or visit bristolhospital.org.