

# Heart smart

## Students get heart screenings at West Bloomfield High School

By David Wallace, C & G Staff Writer

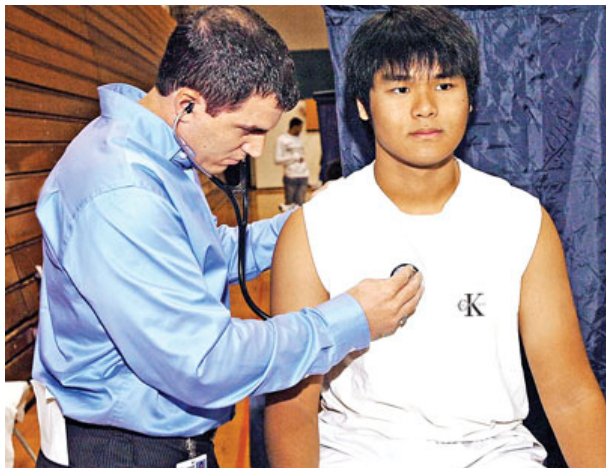


Photo by Deb Jacques

**Dr. Jason Ricci from Beaumont Hospital checks Jon Tao, a senior at West Bloomfield High School, during heart screenings at the school Oct. 26.**

**The screenings intend to prevent sudden cardiac arrest in young people with undiagnosed conditions.**

WEST BLOOMFIELD — Now and then, people hear stories of seemingly healthy, athletic teens who collapse during physical activity and pass away from sudden cardiac arrest.

These deaths often could be prevented if the young people knew of their conditions, which is why Beaumont Hospital started offering more in-depth heart screenings for young people. On Oct. 26, Beaumont screened 280 students at West Bloomfield High School, most of them athletes. It was the third such event that Beaumont had done.

Cardiologist Marc Brodsky, who has a practice in West Bloomfield, looked at the results of blood-pressure tests and electrocardiograms, then consulted with students.

“There’s a few serious cardiac problems that can cause athletes to pass out, or even to die,” said Brodsky. “They are typically not found on just the routine screening that’s done by a pediatrician. So what we’re doing is ... a little more in-depth. If we find any history of a problem, if we see anything on the EKG, we’re actually sending them over to an ultrasound of the heart, an echocardiogram.”

The echocardiograms were set up at the school as well so students would not have to go home worried. At the end of the screenings, a small group of students were told to follow up with their doctors about concerns raised in the screenings, but doctors told no one to immediately stop exercising and consult a doctor.

The screenings are not exhaustive.

“It doesn’t cover everything, but it sort of covers the few biggest things that are likely to cause problems,” said Brodsky.

He explained the causes.

“Something called ‘hypertrophic cardiomyopathy’ is the most common one, which is a certain type of enlargement or thickening of the heart muscle that you really don’t get warning of,” said Brodsky.

They also looked for irregular heartbeats and high blood pressure.

“We actually have seen a number of kids come through with high blood pressure that were unknown,” said Brodsky.

While nerves can cause high blood pressure on tests, Brodsky said that if kids retested high, staff was advising them to follow up on it.

Kim Bonzheim, director of non-invasive cardiology at Beaumont, organized the screenings and explained why they were important to her.

“There was a study that came out about a year ago, and it was from Italy, and they found that by mandatory screening of all their student athletes, doing the electrocardiogram, that they were able to decrease their risk of sudden death by 89 percent,” said Bonzheim.

“It’s a pretty simple test to do the (electrocardiogram). I mean, it’s just some stickers on the chest and having a doctor there to look at it and give some feedback. And so we figured if we could do something like this in the community and really make a difference, then maybe we’ll identify a couple of these kids and prevent some tragedy down the road,” she said.

Bonzheim said that in past screenings, the hospital told three kids to stop exercising and consult a doctor. She said one had hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.

West Bloomfield Director of Athletics Dewayne Jones said that a student collapsing on the playing field is every athletic director’s greatest fear.

“If we have to screen 250 kids to find one kid, then that’s enough for me,” said Jones. “And so this service is great just for that reason alone.”

Susan Gillary lent support to the event. Gillary’s daughter, Kimberly, played for Troy Athens High School’s water polo team in 2000 and suffered sudden cardiac arrest while playing a game for the school. She passed away two days later.

“We’ve long advocated better health screenings for student athletes, so we think this is just a marvelous opportunity to possibly catch someone who has an irregular heartbeat or one of the heart diseases.

“Our daughter had hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, and she had been to regular doctor’s checkups. She had regular quote-unquote ‘health screenings’ for the athletic department. She was very athletic, was in what we thought was top health, and yet she had this disease that was not detected. She had even had an EKG, which it did not show up in during one of her illnesses,” said Gillary.

“I’m hoping that if any of these kids that are going through the screenings have a problem, that it’ll be detected and therefore, it’ll save their life,” said Gillary.

The Kimberly Anne Gillary Foundation advocates that every Michigan high school has an automated external defibrillator and does drills to review how to use them. As students left the screenings, Gillary reviewed with them the locations of the AEDs at West Bloomfield High School.

Emily Lustig, 14, participates in basketball and softball and got a screening.

“It’s a great opportunity, because you just want to make sure you’re careful, especially being an athlete and being an active person,” said Lustig.

Beaumont will have heart screenings for high school students at its Royal Oak hospital Nov. 7 and 8. Call (800) 633-7377 to make a free appointment.

“We would really like to go get some funding or backing and go statewide,” said Bonzheim.

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