

Southern Inland Health Initiative

ETS a life saver for former Cunderdin farmer

Former Cunderdin farmer Peter Ralston has good reason to remember the 46 degree day he stopped his truck to help free some sheep, it was almost his last.

An hour after working without a hat and water in the boiling hot sun Peter was perspiring heavily and he started to feel “an elephant in his chest” and quickly recognised the symptoms of a heart attack.

Peter drove to the Post Office where someone called an ambulance and while in the ambulance he made a decision that probably saved his life.

Given a choice of going to Cunderdin or Kellerberrin, he chose Cunderdin which at that time was one of the few sites in Western Australia linked to the Emergency Telehealth Service.

“When we arrived at hospital there were three nurses, one nurse was putting in the cannula and at the time I thought he was being a bit rough,” said Peter who now lives in Perth.

“I realize now he was trying to get the cannula in quickly because of what was happening.

“I was only in hospital about 10 minutes before I arrested. My son was with me and he said I was talking away and then all of a sudden I was just staring vacantly into space. I don’t remember anything until I woke up feeling electricity running right through my body.

“You really can feel it going right out to your fingertips and your toes –it’s not a sharp pain like you’d expect, but you definitely feel it.

“Anyway, I started to hear things around me again and I slowly started to see again – everything was all ‘brownd out’ at first but got clearer. When I came to, I could see the ETS doctor and he was congratulating the nursing staff on their work and on saving my life.

“I didn’t realize it until after, but they had to shock me twice. They brought me around twice – the electrical shock I remember was actually the second lot of defibrillator panels, as my heart stopped about 20 minutes before that as well.

“I also know now that the nurse was trying to get that cannula in urgently as I needed lots of medications to get me through that patch.”

When Peter was wheeled into the Emergency Department at Cunderdin he was connected via a video link to Perth, one camera was on the ECG monitor while a second camera was on Peter.

From an office in the WA Country Health Service in Perth fitted out with video equipment, Dr Robert Graydon diagnosed that Peter was having an acute myocardial infarction and prescribed medication to treat the condition.



Peter Ralston (left) with Dr Robert Graydon

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When Peter's condition deteriorated and he suffered a cardiac arrest, Dr Graydon assisted the nursing staff to administer two electric shocks which started his heart beating again.

Further medication was prescribed but shortly afterwards Peter suffered another cardiac arrest and a second electric shock was administered which proved successful.

Dr Graydon said that after Peter was stabilized he liaised with the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) to have Peter flown to Royal Perth Hospital.

"I also liaised with the Cardiology Register at RPH and made the Emergency Department aware that Peter was being transferred by the RFDS," Dr Graydon said.

"Following Peter's transfer we conducted a review of the case and discussed the merits of the video linkage. I also complimented the nursing staff at Cunderdin for their professionalism and the way they administered treatments in a timely manner.

"Apart from the obvious limitation of not being physically present at the hospital, the management of this patient was little different from being there in person."

Cunderdin Hospital nursing staff were adamant that without the concise direction from Dr Graydon that Peter would not have survived.

They were amazed at how cool and precise Dr Graydon was. The video linkage equipment performed well with no issues whatsoever.