"Don’t let me die. I’ve got a baby on the way.”

As rescuers rushed Frank Elam of Eupora to the hospital following a car crash, the paralyzed 22-year-old was determined not to miss his firstborn’s birth. Duties he now accomplishes from the seat of his custom wheelchair.

Elam and his wife, Heavenly, relied on the spinal cord injury team at Methodist Rehabilitation Center in Jackson to teach them how to adapt to their new reality. And Heavenly says MRC’s expertise helped make the most of Elam’s hard work.

“They took us in like we were kids,” she said. “People at MRC care about patients and what they are going through.”

“Now that I’m in a wheelchair, I’m going to be best man in a wheelchair I can be,” Elam said. “At the end of the day, it’s all about making the best life for our son.”

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Around the U

Everything that’s going on at UMMC
Around the U

While electricity comes in handy for making toast, streaming Netflix or seeing in the dark, it has been powering a machine that’s much older and more essential than toasters, TV’s and street lights: the human heart.

The heart’s electrical system, or natural pacemaker, triggers the beat that keeps you alive, but sometimes that pulse goes awry, a condition that contributes to as many as 200,000 to 300,000 sudden deaths each year.

The disorder, called arrhythmia, is diagnosed when the heart beats too fast or too slow, and falls under the bailiwick of highly-trained medical subspecialists called cardiac electrophysiologists, or EP’s.

They are so primed and well-conditioned for the fight against heart disease that the University of Mississippi Medical Center has hired two of these experts to revitalize a program that can affect many patients’ lives: Dr. James “Mike” Bensler and Dr. James “Jimmy” Hamilton IV.

“We are building an EP section around them,” said Dr. Michael McMullan, professor of medicine and director of the Division of Cardiology.

“It is extremely important for the care of our patients. The two biggest-growing areas of cardiology are structural heart disease and electrophysiology. EP’s have more ability than ever to treat advanced arrhythmias. What a difference they will make for our patients. We are fortunate to have them here.”

Just before they were here, Hamilton and Bensler worked at Baptist Medical Center in Jackson. “They are an integral part of our division already,” McMullan said.

Already, Hamilton, assistant professor of medicine, has started the Medical Center’s first consult service for a particular type of arrhythmia, atrial fibrillation, or AFib, a risk for stroke, heart failure, blood clots and more.

The consult service aids in the management of inpatients with AFib, which is best treated by subspecialists; it’s the only such service in Jackson,” said Hamilton, who arrived at UMMC in August.

“It’s important to have a strong program in cardiac EP because it allows us to operate at the highest level of our technological abilities, which makes it safer for the patient.”

Their abilities are enhanced by the “greatest and latest” tools, McMullan said. “These guys can do everything, so we don’t have to refer patients out.”

The tools include devices that allow for better management of heart failure for their patients as well as advanced technology such as micro pacemakers, “which are smaller than a quarter, and have no leads,” McMullan said.

These Heart Rhythm Experts Don’t Miss a Beat

BY GARY PETTUS

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At University Heart, Bensler, center, with Haseloff, left, and Quentin Greathree, a Jackson-based member of Abbott Laboratories’ sup-
Pacemaker wires called leads may break, dislodge and drift away from the original site. With leadless pacemakers, patients avoid these complications.

Hamilton and Bensler are also adept at cardiac ablation, a procedure to fix arrhythmia by scarring or destroying in the heart the tissue that sets off or fosters the heart problem.

“It’s a tactical strike,” Hamilton said.

Bensler and Hamilton are also striving to make treatment more convenient for their patients. They switch duties week to week: While one does procedures daily at University Heart, the other one is seeing patients on the first floor of Select Specialty Hospital on Ridgewood Road.

“In the past, it could be a two- or three-month wait to see an electrophysiologist,” said Bensler, assistant professor of medicine, who re-connected with Hamilton at the Medical Center in January.

“We pride ourselves on offering good access to care for our patients.”

Helping ensure that availability is a staff that includes EP registered nurse care coordinator, medical assistants, device clinic technicians and administrative assistants and more, all to accommodate, daily, at least 30 to 35 patients in the clinic, as well as remote cardiac device monitoring.

Patients in Mississippi have been seeing Hamilton and Bensler for years. Originally from Anchorage, Alaska, Bensler is a 2003 graduate of the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. He did his residency at UW before taking on fellowships in cardiovascular disease and clinical cardiac electrophysiology at the Texas Heart Institute in Houston.

He has been in the Jackson area for about a decade, including a stint at St. Dominic Hospital.

“Mississippi is a great place to practice, a great place to work and a great place to raise a family,” Bensler said.

Hamilton, a Long Beach native, earned his undergraduate degree in chemical engineering at the University of Mississippi before graduating in 2007 from the School of Medicine at UMMC, where he also completed his internal medicine residency and a cardiology fellowship.

After finishing his electrophysiology training at Krannert Institute of Cardiology at the Indiana University School of Medicine, Hamilton returned with his family to Mississippi, where he worked for Baptist Heart for more than three years before joining UMMC as the EP section chief in August of 2019.

“Being here in Mississippi allows you to take care of the patients who need you the most,” he said. To that end, one of his goals as the EP section chief is to spread the program’s services throughout Mississippi.

“I want to build a program here that is nationally respected and capable of caring for the full range of cardiac arrhythmia disorders the state’s residents may face,” he said.

For people who are at risk of severe debilitation, who are living with such symptoms as shortness of breath, exercise intolerance, fatigue and chest discomfort, the heart of the matter is this, Bensler said: “All physicians have a profound impact on the quality of life for patients. But when a patient has a heart rhythm disorder, you can have an especially profound impact.”
The average resident of the 39211 zip code in Jackson lives to be over 79 years old, a remarkable length of time considering the average American in 1900 lived to be only 47. Think about that— if you were born in 1900 anywhere in America, you could not realistically expect to see your children grow to have their own. Now, even in the state near the bottom for life expectancy, you can see not only your grandchildren but even your great-grandchildren. You can surpass the average life expectancy of the most advanced countries in the world right here in Jackson. But if they looked just 6 miles to the west, they would find a different story: the average resident of the 39213 zip code lives almost ten years less, at just over 71 years old.

For many of the people born in this area, health is a product of a system that is centuries in the making, born out of the complex arithmetic of our nation and state’s history. Healthcare disparities are tied to so many factors, but unfortunately in our state they are tightly bound to race and socioeconomic status. nowhere else is this more apparent than in the data for coronavirus in Mississippi. It is a simple but harsh reality that decisions made hundreds of years ago are clearly still affecting Mississippians, black and white, today. Since 2002, the Jackson Free Clinic has sought to relieve barriers to healthcare access in Mississippi by serving its uninsured population. UMMC students, residents and physicians have given countless hours over the past 18 years to caring for the Mississippians who have been forgotten, left behind with a life expectancy comparable to the United States in the 1970s, or Moldova today. The JFC could not exist without the level of care that UMMC students have for Mississippi. It relies on your selflessness and sacrifice to operate, and it will look ahead to increasing the availability of services for its patients. With the help of our pharmacy students, we will soon provide OTC and prescription medications at no cost to our patients. Our dental team continues to be our most sought after service, and our PT/OT students are seeing more and more patients with chronic pain and range of motion difficulty than ever before. We look forward to adding representatives from the School of Population Health in order to create a better approach to preventive care. During the current public health crisis of COVID-19, JFC staff have stayed in touch with patients, making sure their medications are current and conducting telehealth visits with those in need. We are in the process of reopening, with the safety of our patients and volunteers as our top priority. The JFC sees over 1000 patients every year, and with your help, those people will receive better care than ever before.

Many of these patients come for chronic needs, like hypertension and diabetes management, which helies a need for improved access to nutritional foods, increased health literacy, and of course, increased health insurance coverage. A much larger percentage of visits in recent years have been for acute care, largely STI treatment, which shines a light on problems with sexual health education in our city and state. All of these factors contribute to areas we can and must improve, and as healthcare workers, we bear the greatest responsibility to speak up for these patients. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “It is a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself up by his bootstraps.” It is incumbent on us to advocate for, and not to blame, the people who come to us as a product of a system that is centuries in the making. As we move ahead in our careers, we should look for ways we can improve the system that created healthcare disparities. In the meantime, we can make an immediate impact on an individual basis. The Jackson Free Clinic is at its heart an advocate for Mississippi. Everyone who gives time there is actively bringing the state up from the bottom of every health ranking list, one patient at a time. We hope for the day when the JFC is no longer needed, but as long as there is an almost ten year difference across I-55, we look forward to seeing you there.

Brent’s Drug Store

The secret passage into The Apothecary, a local speakeasy-themed joint you need to try. Yes they are open! Thurs-Sat 5-10pm
THE CURBSIDE COLLECTION

The best eats for your quarantine
with some quality recs and a good number for ordering

Pig and Pint
the bacon melt (omg it’s the bomb), disco fries, ribs
601 326 6070

Elvie’s
Duck fat french fries are a must. Chef Hunter Evans was featured in the latest issue of Garden & Gun. (@elviesrestaurant)
601 863 8828

Saltine
their po boys are fire, catch their monday ramen or their weekend brunch
601 982 2899

Green Ghost Tacos
tacos tacos tacos! $2 tacos on tues, (p.s. ask for verde salsa if that’s your thing)
601 487 6082

Babalu
roasted chicken tacos, the baba burger, $4 babarita mix (just add tequila)
601 366 5757

Crawdad Hole
crawfish duh
601 982 9299

Aladdin
hummus and lamb plate, aladdin sampler for 2 (or 1, no judge)
601 366 6033

Wingstop on State Street
raise your classic cajuns (with fries) in the air for no-contact delivery!
601 969 6400

Picantes
there’s a thing called “pollo carley” and it was sent from heaven, also curbside margs!
601 398 1344

Krilakis
“lamb + chicken gyro, any of the salads, burger, badass fries” -Dr. Matthew Alias
601 790 9463

Thai Tasty
“chicken pad thai (thai hot), chicken fried rice (thai hot)” -Katie Brown, MD
601 540 2534

EDO
“volcano roll is dank” -Dr. Will Dungan
601 899 8518

Apolos
“mezza sampler: try the grape leaves, cheese rolls, and cauliflower” -Dr. MM Hitt
601 714 8989

Amerigo
“goat cheese + penne w/ chicken + extra goat cheese is *kisses fingers*” -Katie
“cheese fritters are a must” -Dr. Kelsey Berry, pediatrician to the stars
601 977 0563

Fine & Dandy
their grandma chick sandwich made the list for best chicken sandwich in america by the daily meal... remember when chicken sandwich wars were a pressing national issue? [sigh]
601 202 5050

Sophomore Spanish Club
drive thru hot meal pick up with a menu that changes daily, drive thru grocery store for all your pantry and household needs (seriously, their online grocery will blow your mind)
601 203 3333
Mac and cheese might be the most nostalgic food in each of our personal histories. It would be impossible to tell the story of your life without it making an appearance: It may have been your favorite day in the elementary cafeteria. It’s possibly what you made yourself out of the blue box when the babysitter neglected to provide you dinner other than the generous offer of “I dunno, don’t you like cereal?” It’s an included item, perhaps a definitive feature, on the “vegetable list” at countless restaurants across the south. It’s even threaded into our fabric as Americans. In a list from thrillist.com “Ranking the 50 Most American Foods,” Mac and Cheese is number 11. Considering how difficult it is to define foods that distinctly represent American cuisine, the importance of cheesy mac should not be overlooked.

That brings us to our hero today. This is my great-aunt Betty Bobo’s recipe. She is an incredible woman with an enviable proficiency at story-telling, a sharp wit, and a big generous heart. Whenever my family makes a baked mac and cheese, this is our go-to recipe. The beauty of a baked pasta dish is you get the marriage of melty cheese with the toasted crunch of breadcrumbs. If you’re using cheddar it has to be sharp. Last time I made this I substituted with gouda (you can buy it already shredded at the grocery store). Don’t tell Aunt Betty I modified the sacred text, but I got to admit – the gouda was gooda.

Enjoy.

Aunt Betty’s Macaroni and Cheese for Adults

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