



## IMPLANTED HEART RHYTHM DEVICES

### What are these devices?

When a person experiences an irregular heartbeat a physician may decide to implant a small device, in the chest, that will return the heartbeat back to normal. The implanted device is composed of a small battery and a few wires that run through the blood vessels closest to the heart. There are two different devices, each serving a different function: the implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) and the pacemaker. While the devices are not the same, they have one common goal: to improve the quality of life and prevent premature death in an otherwise healthy patient.

- The **pacemaker** treats a slow heartbeat with a small amount of PAINLESS energy.
- The **ICD** delivers a strong electric shock to treat a dangerously fast heartbeat (often described by patients as “a PAINFUL kick in the chest”).

### Why is this important to you?

When a patient and their loved ones enroll in hospice, their goal of care is to be comfortable for the remainder of their life (generally six months or less). To achieve this goal, it is crucial that you discuss your implanted device with your attending physician. Keeping an open conversation about your end-of-life wishes with your family and care team will ensure that you don't receive any undesired medical treatment.

### Turning OFF an ICD

Your Hospice Care Team shares your goal; we want to ensure that you experience the most peaceful death possible. That may not be possible if your ICD provides strong, life-saving shocks during the last moments of life. It is advised to plan ahead and coordinate this several weeks ahead of the potential anticipated time of death. It can also be very troubling for you and your loved ones, as the jolts of energy are known for being painful. Important facts to remember as you contemplate turning off an ICD:

- Deactivating the ICD will not cause immediate death.
- The deactivation process is not painful and will not increase pain during the dying process.
- Turning off the device is not difficult or time consuming-it is usually done at an office or hospital, but it can even be done in your home by the device company **if this is planned ahead.**
- Once the ICD is turned off it will no longer prevent death in the event of a fast heartbeat.
- If the ICD also serves as a pacemaker, the device can be reprogrammed to only keep the pacemaker function on-which may alleviate associated heart failure symptoms without preventing death.



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### Turning OFF a pacemaker

Unlike the ICD, a pacemaker does not cause pain, and will not prevent death. The consequences of deactivating a pacemaker may vary with each patient; therefore, it is important that you speak with your Care Team to determine if it is the right option for you. Prior to this discussion, review these important facts:

- A pacemaker does not beat for the heart, it delivers energy which stimulates the heart muscle to beat.
- If the patient stops breathing, and the heart no longer has oxygen, not even the energy from the pacemaker can restart heartbeat.
- If you have heart failure, the pacemaker may be beneficial through the end of life; increasing the heartbeat can decrease uncomfortable symptoms-without preventing death.
- Your health and quality of life may be affected by increased symptoms should you decide to deactivate your pacemaker.

A mnemonic to help you help you remember the important steps when making significant medical decisions:

**N**otify your loved ones of your wishes and document them  
**E**ducate yourself about treatment options  
**E**valuate all of your treatment options  
**D**iscuss your preferences with your Care Team  
**S**eek mental and spiritual health care to aid you in this difficult time

We want to help you make the decision that suits you and your loved ones the best. Whatever you decide, we will do everything in our power to protect you and your loved ones from suffering. Please review the above information and ask your Care Team about any additional questions you may have.

#### *References*

*Snipes, G., Rosman, J., & Sears, S. (2014). End of life and heart rhythm devices. Retrieved June 21, 2016, from <http://www.hrsonline.org/Patient-Resources/Patient-Information-Sheets>*

**Need more information or help? Call 633-3400 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to get live help. Thank you for letting us help care for you and your loved ones.**