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www.ccthd.org

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Is MedicAlert Right for You?

Have you ever considered what might happen if you or a loved one had a medical emergency and could not speak? Research indicates as many as 13,200 emergency department admissions are complicated by delays in obtaining accurate, up-to-date medical information. With so many conditions having similar symptoms, and so many people taking a number of medications for various disorders, determining the cause of a person's condition and the best course of treatment can be a challenge for emergency medical personnel.

Dr. Marion and Chrissie Collins realized the importance of having medical information available to first responders in 1954 when their teenage daughter nearly died from an allergy to a tetanus antitoxin shot she received. They decided to have a special bracelet made for her to wear that would warn medical personnel of her allergy. The idea became popular among everyone their daughter met, and soon enough, MedicAlert was born. From its humble beginnings in 1956, the MedicAlert Foundation has grown into an international organization with affiliates in nine countries, sharing its mission to protect and save lives.

MedicAlert is a nonprofit organization that handles emergency calls pertaining to its members 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Through the years, the organization has grown, providing emergency service response even when members are traveling abroad. (Translation services are offered in over 140 languages.) Upon registering with MedicAlert, a person provides medical information for their MedicAlert file; this information can be updated at no additional cost as often as necessary. He or she can obtain a bracelet with the MedicAlert emblem, which emergency medical personnel recognize upon checking the patient's pulse. The bracelet provides the first responder with the identification number of the person being treated, his or her medical condition(s), and the phone number of the Emergency Response Center. In the event of an emergency, vital information like medical conditions (including allergies), medications and dosages, and details about any implants or medical devices is relayed to the first responder so precious time is not wasted.

In addition to identifying a patient and providing important medical information to emergency medical workers, MedicAlert notifies the family members or designated contact of the patient about the emergency. Further, MedicAlert offers a medication dosage service to keep a record of all medications, and can be used to store other health related information, such as insurance information, brand and model number of medical devices, and deactivation instructions for implants and other devices. All personal and medical information is stored in a secure database, and is never distributed to any unauthorized organizations or personnel.

In keeping with current technological advances, MedicAlert has introduced the E-Health Key (including software on a CD). This is a portable device that can be plugged into any personal computer's USB port. The

E-Health Key can be used to store the medical history of the member and his or her family, to track medications, to record and graph results from laboratory reports, track fitness goals, store medical images, create an emergency wallet card, set and receive reminders, or generate personal medical reports. Medical reports can be communicated that relate only to a specific condition, or entire medical histories can be reported. To protect privacy, the data is encrypted and password protected.

There is an enrollment fee and smaller annual fee for members. August, designated MedicAlert Awareness month, is an optimal time to assess your own health needs and determine if joining MedicAlert makes sense for you. To obtain more information about MedicAlert or to read about its history, visit www.medicalert.org, or call

1-800-432-5378. The Central Connecticut Health District, serving the towns of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill, and Wethersfield, can provide information about this or other public health concerns. To contact the Health District, call 860-721-2822 or visit www.ccthd.org.