## HEART OF THE MATTER

# How One Clinician Responds to COURAGE

Mr. Salvatore Armani is on my schedule today. I saw him about 4 weeks ago when he was referred because he was experiencing chest pressure climbing up a flight of stairs.

BY SIDNEY GOLDSTEIN, M.D.

I had seen him almost 3 years ago when he was 65 and was referred to me for the treatment of his hypertension. In the interval, he had been followed by his internist until the development of his recent symptoms. His blood pressure was fairly well controlled on thiazide diuretics and a calcium entry blocker. His internist had started him on statin therapy.

Although it was clear that his symptoms represented angina, I ordered an exercise echocardiogram to define the ischemic region of his ventricle and to get a feeling about the severity of his symptoms. Last week, his stress echocardiogram came back indicating that he had significant ECG and echocardiographic evidence of ischemia in the posterolateral region of the ventricle occurring in the second phase of his stress test when his heart rate reached 120 and his blood pressure was 170/80. He had experienced some chest pressure at that time.

Before the report of the COURAGE (Clinical Outcomes Utilizing Revascularization and Aggressive Drug Evaluation) trial (CARDIOLOGY NEWS, April 2007, p. 1) I would have automatically referred him to my interventional colleagues for angiography and almost certain angioplasty. Today, I paused and reflected on the message of the trial.

It was information that was not new to me. I knew for some time that angioplasty and, for that matter, coronary artery bypass graft, had little or no impact on mortality or morbidity of coronary artery disease. The Coronary Artery Surgery Study (Circulation 1983;68:939-50) more than 20 years ago had clearly shown that, with the exception of those patients with left ventricular dysfunction, there was no mortality benefit achieved by bypass surgery. Even in those patients with left ventricular dysfunction, the benefits were uncertain.

*See related editorial on page 10.*

More recently, a meta-analysis of percutaneous coronary intervention over the past 10 years (Circulation 2005;111:2906-12) showed that there was no mortality benefit, but a marginal benefit in angina could be achieved with angioplasty in an era devoid of statin therapy and when β-blockade was less than optimal. This was information that was easily accessible to anyone reading the cardiology literature, and it was reinforced by American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association guidelines.

On numerous occasions, I had sat down with patients in an attempt to outline these facts, but my lecture routinely fell on deaf ears and my reluctance to arrange an angiogram was perceived by my patients. They thanked me for my advice and went "up the street" to get their angioplasty. I had even given the same lecture to my close friends. They figured that I had not kept up with what was going on in cardiology and drove off to have there angioplasties performed by more "forward looking" cardiologists. Frankly, I had been beaten down and I found it easier to go along with the crowd.

The results of COURAGE may bring in a new era in our understanding of the benefits and risks of percutaneous coronary intervention and how we should apply it in the treatment of coronary artery disease. Today, I have not only medical science behind me, but the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and even the Detroit Free Press. All of these papers and many more prided themselves in hyping up the miracles that could be achieved by stents and extolling the wonders performed by the cardiologists "up the street." Now they were suddenly on my side. They printed in bold headlines that pills were as good as a stent.

I guess I'll try it out again on Sal. ■

DR. GOLDSTEIN, *medical editor of Cardiology News, is professor of medicine at Wayne State University and division head, emeritus, of cardiovascular medicine at Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit.*

## PAIN RELIEVERS

**"When I pay for a second opinion I expect it to be different!"**



Cardiology News

**President, IMNG** Alan J. Imhoff

**Executive Director, Editorial** Mary Jo M. Dales
**Executive Editor, IMNG** Denise Fulton
**Executive Editor, EGMN** Kathy Scarbeck
**Publication Editor** Catherine Hackett
**Senior Editors** Lori Buckner-Farmer (EGMN), Christina Chase, Kathryn DeMott, Joyce Frieden, Gwendolyn B. Hall, Gina L. Henderson, Sally Koch Kubetin, Teresa Lassman (EGMN), Mark S. Lesney, Jane Salodof MacNeil (Oncology), Catherine Cooper Nellist, Amy Pfeiffer, Calvin Pierce, Terry Rudd, Robin Turner, Elizabeth Wood
**Associate Editors** Alicia Ault, John R. Bell, Lorinda Bullock, Jay C. Cherniak, Richard Franki, Randall Frey, Renée Matthews, Leanne Sullivan
**Assistant Editor, Graphics** Kari Ledbetter
**Assistant Editor** Denise Napoli
**Bureaus** Betsy Bates (Los Angeles), Sherry Boschert (San Francisco), Doug Brunk (San Diego), Bruce K. Dixon (Chicago), Robert Finn (San Francisco), Jonathan Gardner (London), Bruce Jancin (Denver), Kate Johnson (Montreal), Timothy F. Kirn (Sacramento), Fran Lowry (Orlando), Diana Mahoney (New England), Damian McNamara (Miami), Mary Ellen Schneider (New York), Michele G. Sullivan (Mid-Atlantic), Nancy Walsh (New York), Patrice Wendling (Chicago), Sharon Worcester (Southeast), Mitchel L. Zoler (Philadelphia)
**Senior Writers** Jeff Evans, Elizabeth Mechcatie, Heidi Splete, Miriam E. Tucker, Kerri Wachter
**Contributing Writers** Christine Kilgore, Mary Ann Moon
**Copy Chief** Felicia R. Black
**Assistant Copy Chief** Carol Nicotera-Ward
**Copy Editors** Therese Borden, Julia Duncan, Mimi Harrison, Virginia Ingram-Wells, Jane Locastro, Arlene Sheir-Allen
**Editorial Offices** 5635 Fishers Lane, Suite 6000, Rockville, MD 20852, 800-445-6975, cardiologynews@elsevier.com

**Executive Director, Operations** Jim Chicca
**Director, Production/Manufacturing** Yvonne Evans
**Production Manager** Judi Sheffer
**Production Specialists** Anthony Draper, Rebecca Slebodnik, Mary D. Templin
**Information Technology Manager** Doug Sullivan
**Senior Systems Administrator** Lee J. Unger
**Systems Administrator** Drew Mintz
**Operations Assistant** Melissa Kasimatis
**Art Director** Louise A. Koenig
**Design Supervisor** Elizabeth Byrne Lobdell
**Senior Designer** Julie Keller
**Design Staff** Maricel Baquista, Sarah L. Gallant, Yenling Liu, Angie Ries
**Photo Editors** Vivian E. Lee, Sherilyn M. Mattes, Jay Westcott
**Project Manager** Susan D. Hite
**Assignments Manager** Megan Evans
**Assistant Meetings Coordinator** Helen Clyde
**Department Coordinator** Vicki Long
**Editorial Coordinator** Daniela Silva
**H.R. Manager** Stephanie Phelan
**Address Changes** Fax change of address (with old mailing label) to 973-290-8245 or e-mail change to subs@elsevier.com
**Reprints** Call 240-221-2419

CARDIOLOGY NEWS is an independent newspaper that provides the practicing specialist with timely and relevant news and commentary about clinical developments in the field and about the impact of health care policy on the specialty and the physician's practice.

The ideas and opinions expressed in CARDIOLOGY NEWS do not necessarily reflect those of the Publisher. Elsevier Inc. will not assume responsibility for damages, loss, or claims of any kind arising from or related to the information contained in this publication, including any claims related to the products, drugs, or services mentioned herein.

**V.P., Med. Ed./Bus. Development** Sylvia H. Reitman
**Program Managers, Med. Ed.** Jenny R. McMahon, Malika Wicks
**Senior Director, Marketing/Research** Janice Theobald
**Marketing Associate** Jennifer Savo
**Sales Director** Mark E. Altier
**Bus. Manager** Dennis Quirk
**Adv. Services Manager** Joan Friedman
**Credit Supervisor** Patricia H. Ramsey
**Manager, Administration/Conventions** Lynne Kalish
**Sales Assistant** Karen Benarzi
**Receptionist** Linda Wilson
**National Account Managers** Sue Fagan, 973-290-8226, s.fagan@elsevier.com; Barbara Napoli, 973-290-8224, b.napoli@elsevier.com; Christy Tetterton, 973-290-8231, c.tetterton@elsevier.com
**Advertising Offices** 60 Columbia Rd., Bldg. B, Morristown, NJ 07960, 973-290-8200, fax 973-290-8250
**Classified Sales Manager** Brian Vishnupad, 212-633-3129, fax 212-633-3820, b.vishnupad@elsevier.com
**Classified Advertising Offices** 360 Park Ave. South, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10010, 800-379-8785

POSTMASTER Send changes of address (with old mailing label) to Circulation, CARDIOLOGY NEWS, 5635 Fishers Lane, Suite 6000, Rockville, MD 20852.

CARDIOLOGY NEWS (ISSN 1544-8800) *is published monthly by Elsevier Inc., 60 Columbia Rd., Building B, Morristown, NJ 07960, 973-290-8200, fax 973-290-8250. Subscription price is $90.00 a year.*


INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL NEWS GROUP