

The Michael Hughes Story



Julie Hughes' husband Michael had been sick with symptoms of reflux for a period of 6 months. Heart was not initially considered to be the cause. After trialling medications, visiting specialists and conducting tests, Michael was finally diagnosed with Dilated Cardiomyopathy. When correctly diagnosed, Michael started responding well to treatment for his heart condition.

Only a few weeks after his diagnosis, Michael passed away from sudden cardiac arrest.

Julie says it was a normal Monday morning at home in the two-bedroom unit she shared with Michael and their two-month old daughter Georgia.

"Mike was in the shower getting ready for work and I'd gone into the kitchen and noticed the water was running cold. I went to look for Michael and straight away noticed that Mike had collapsed in the bathroom, was blue and was slumped lifeless on the floor."

After ringing an Ambulance, Julie ran to her neighbour to get help moving Michael. She performed CPR (chest compressions) as instructed by the 000 phone operator until the Ambulance crews arrived about five minutes later.

Although still unresponsive, Michael's colour had come back to normal by the time the paramedics commenced their advanced treatment and used a defibrillator. He was taken to hospital but pronounced dead on arrival.

"As the first responder, I feel I did everything I could to save him, but I was behind the eight ball as his heart was very weak," she said.

"We knew Mike's heart condition was serious but we didn't even know sudden cardiac arrest was a possibility. It was also never discussed as a possibility by any healthcare professionals. It wasn't until later in the Emergency Department that I learned how weak his heart was."

“Of course he had symptoms and warning signs, but like any death you still ask the question, why wasn’t it picked up earlier and why wasn’t more done?”

“It’s so unexpected when someone young, fit and healthy suddenly dies in this way.”

Since Michael’s death, Julie has remained adamant that she doesn’t want to be pitied. As part of her work as Executive Director of the Michael Hughes Foundation she continues to search for answers about why sudden cardiac arrest occurs. “As I’ve chipped away looking into sudden cardiac arrest, it’s become a way for me to investigate, to ask questions, and to understand the complexities more,” she said.

“We understand that we are one of many stories of loss and there are a lot of people going through this - we’re all dealing with lots of unknowns – how and why some people don’t survive.

“It’s so important to understand your family history of heart conditions (or other health issues) so you can be proactive and understand the implications on your own health. In our situation, this is the reason we are conducting genetic testing for the sake of our daughter Georgia”.

“But there will always be lots of questions and lots of unknowns. That’s what makes our grief harder.”

Julie says the suddenness of death from cardiac arrests causes widespread impacts and shock across whole communities.

“The comprehension of the situation is really hard. The people left behind struggle because it is so hard to ever come to terms with,” she said.

But regardless of what we feel or how we grieve, the cruel reality is that life continues on and it can be a really tough concept to get your head around.

“I find myself full of mixed emotions, and do think about all the times when Georgia will want her dad but he won’t be here.”

“But I know that Michael was always full of life and positive, so I really want to continue a commitment to remembering this amazing man, being involved with making improvements with this health issue and doing something with a positive impact to the community.”

ENDS

The Michael Hughes Foundation was established specifically to honour Michael. The aims of the Foundation are to raise awareness of sudden cardiac arrest, the placement of defibrillators in the community and turning bystanders into first responders.

Our work endeavours to improve people’s knowledge of what is sudden cardiac arrest, encourage everyone to have current first aid qualifications and most importantly have confidence to respond in medical emergencies – with particular focus on cardiac arrest as minutes matter!

For more information, visit www.mhf.life