Longtime St. Francis Employee Won’t Let Heart Problems Slow Her Down

February is American Heart Month

To say Dolores Smalls has enjoyed a long career at St. Francis Medical Center is an understatement.

A 62-year St. Francis veteran – she started here in 1957 as a secretary – Dolores is currently Medical Records supervisor. She is also a very satisfied St. Francis heart patient.

“I’ve always had all my care here,” said Dolores. “In my mind, St. Francis is number one, I wouldn’t go anywhere else.”

Dolores’ heart problems began years ago when she was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (a-fib), a common heart-rhythm condition that occurs when the top half of the heart quivers in a very fast or uncoordinated way. It never got bad enough for an intervention.

Flash forward to 2019. Dolores is under the care of St. Francis cardiologists John Caplan, MD, and Edward Wingfield, MD, both of Hamilton Cardiology Associates. They were concerned with Dolores’ increasingly irregular heartbeat and slow heart rate. They recommended a cardiac catheterization to check things out.

In the St. Francis Catheterization Lab, several blockages in the arteries around her heart were discovered. The solution was to implant two stents to open up the arteries and improve blood flow.

“At first I didn’t notice much of a difference, but as the days went by my breathing and stamina improved,” Dolores said. “I still have a slow heartbeat, and I have a feeling my doctors will recommend a pacemaker. If that’s the case, I’ll have that done at St. Francis too.”

Dolores isn’t one to slow down. Within days of having the stents placed, she was getting to go to work in the morning. One of her daughters asked her where she was going.

“I’m going to work,” Dolores replied. “Then my daughter said, ‘Your doctor didn’t say you could go to work!’ I said, he didn’t tell me I couldn’t. She was so mad. But as I was driving to work, I prayed ‘Dear Lord, please look after me or else my kids will say they told me so.’”

Dolores’ message to others about their heart health: “I encourage everyone, especially as they get older, to be aware of heart problems and get checked out if you think something may be wrong. People should be on top of this, there are so many things that can be done these days. It’s amazing how far heart procedures have come, and St. Francis is one of the best places to receive care.”