

No Time to Waste

A one-day exam stopped time from running out for busy executive

Dennis Wilson, President & CEO, Delta Dental of NJ and CT, is a decades-long veteran of the health care industry, who recently received a shocking diagnosis after completing the Atlantic Health System Executive Health Program (EHP), a customized, one-day physical exam. An



Left to right: Mark Blum, MD, FACC, Damion Martins, MD, Director of Executive Health Program (EHP), Pam Crowley, Manager of EHP, Dona Wilson, Dennis Wilson, President and CEO, Delta Dental of NJ and CT, Bonnie Gannon, Director of Corporate & Foundation Relations, Morristown Medical Center, John Brown, MD, Chief of Cardiovascular Surgery, Morristown Medical Center

imminent, life-threatening cardiac condition resulted in him requiring quintuple bypass surgery. Several months later and very grateful, Dennis — feeling well and back to his normal routine — sat down to talk with Luke Margolis, corporate communications manager, Atlantic Health System, to share his experience and why he considers himself an “evangelist” for EHP.



LM: How did you become familiar with the Executive Health Program?

DW: When I walked in as President and CEO of Delta Dental of NJ and CT four years ago, there had already been established a nice working relationship between Delta and Atlantic Health System, as well as Morristown Medical Center. It was only while my wife Dona and I were relocating from CT to NJ, being new to the Morris County area, and transitioning health care provider relationships, that I got to know Bonnie Gannon at the hospital's Foundation, very well. I knew the reputation of Atlantic Health System and Morristown Medical Center from our prior stays in NJ and their reputation has always been solid.



John Brown, MD, with Dennis Wilson

My wife was concerned about me getting a comprehensive, all day, Mayo Clinic-like exam done in NY, Cleveland Clinic or Mayo — you know the ones that are famous. It was during that time that Bonnie enlightened us to the existence of the Executive Health Program (EHP) and she was a good ambassador.

My wife then connected with EHP's Pam Crowley in the fall of 2016 and became educated on what Executive Health does and to learn that, right here in Morristown,

literally 10 minutes from my home, there is an EHP. When Pam did a great job explaining the program, Dona highly encouraged me every day at the dinner table to go and find out about this, speak to Pam Crowley and get educated about this program.

“... right here in Morristown, literally 10 minutes from my home, there is an Executive Health Program...”

You've heard of 'young invincible', well I'm an old invincible. No problems, no issues, no symptoms, maybe carrying 15 pounds more than I should but otherwise healthy. I'm the kind of person 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it.' My one-hour physical examination done by my physician would do just fine. Dona knew I had a family history. My father died of a heart attack at age 49. There are cardiac issues on my mother's side of the family, so I was cursed with bad genes, so to speak, in that regard. So Dona took it upon herself to learn about Executive Health.

LM: The demands on your time are substantial from a professional perspective — little time for personal things or taking care of yourself. Was there something you found convenient about being able to do this, not just geographically close to where you are, but in an expeditious fashion — a one-stop shop? Was that an attractive element?

DW: The answer is yes. To go through the whole gamut of getting an appointment with a dermatologist, internist, cardiologist, etc., is pretty daunting. Not only the logistics but

the time it takes for two hours here, one hour there, etc. The aspect of getting all of my medical information, records, gathered and compiled into one spot to be later used to have a one-day comprehensive physical, if you will, was very appealing to me.

LM: What turned up? Let's walk through the elements of how the returns came in and how your wife and you decided what was next?

“The program saved my life and I feel incredibly lucky that it did. Go and get this done.”

DW: All medical records were gathered, a very comprehensive questionnaire was filled out, a self-assessment, then a battery of blood and other tests were performed. From that body of knowledge, a very professional nursing staff at Executive Health led me through the questionnaire and so forth, getting at the stuff they needed to know, to set up and fine-tune this comprehensive day. I was very pleased with the preliminary process with all the due diligence and information gathering, clinical and otherwise that was done. I very much felt like it was a customized experience and I was very impressed that when I went in there, on the last day of March, it was all about me. There were no other patients in the space, it was all about Dennis Wilson. A whole battery of things attended to. My cholesterol was fine, no hypertension, my blood pressure was perfect, my metabolism was that of a person 10 to 15 years younger than myself. All of that checked out fine. Only during the stress test, Dr. Mark Blum standing alongside me, while I was going through the stress test, reading and interpreting the results on the spot, said

‘Hey, there’s something that we’re seeing here. It’s probably going to be OK, but it’s a little irregular so we want you to go through additional tests.’

Fast forward to mid-April when he prescribed a cardiac CAT scan, which further revealed some issues, blockages in my arteries. ‘We really think you need a cardiac catheterization. It’ll really tell us the story, the most comprehensive view we can get, to know if we need to go through with surgery.’

I did that on the 27th of April at Morristown Medical Center. Dr. Blum performed that diagnostic test and told me “You are not going anywhere, you have blockages; we need to do a quintuple bypass surgery and we’re going to get the best to have this done.” That was cardiac surgeon Dr. John Brown, who operated on me the very next day.

LM: You’d be forgiven for being scared at that diagnosis. When a man hears something like that, how does he react?

DW: I’ll rewind a little bit. When Dr. Blum called me on my cellphone to tell me that I really ought to have a cardiac catheterization, I was on the 9th hole of Morris County Golf Club course, and this was in the spring, carrying my own bag alone. It’s the farthest point from the clubhouse you could get. I was the most terrified at that moment because that was a ‘holy sh*t’ moment. [I knew] I’ve got something going on. He asked me if I had any baby aspirin on me. When I went through this cardiac catheterization I had already prepared myself this could go to an extreme. At that point, I was mentally prepared for the ensuing stuff to happen.

LM: How do you feel about this experience and there are many men who, like you, are golfing or fishing or feeling like their docket is full enough, and they may be missing the same thing you missed? How do you feel about that, knowing what you know?

DW: I've become evangelical to a point. I feel that my life has been saved. My wife Dona saved my life by her incredible persistence to get me to do this. I sit on a board, I'm the chair of a board on the Community Foundation of NJ with Gary Fish, another of your evangelists, if you will. He was very encouraging when I said I'm thinking about this. He said absolutely go and do it, so I had gotten encouragement from others.

The program saved my life and I feel incredibly lucky that it did. I reflect back on this and thinking that, hey there was nothing wrong with my father either, so I feel incredibly lucky,



Left to right: Dennis Wilson, Damion Martins, MD, and Mark Blum, MD, FACC

blessed and everything. To be, number one, just around great health care period, but to have this program at my disposal to be able to tap into in a very expeditious and convenient way that is allowing me to have this conversation with you right now ... I feel pretty darn good.

LM: What's your message to folks who aren't sure they need to go through something like this?

DW: This is about your life. This is about you. Take care of Number One here. Go and get this done. Get the stress test, get everything out that surrounds what's happening with your body at your age. Get it checked out if only for the peace of mind that everything's going to be OK and forewarned is forearmed. You can deal with whatever they find. Deal with it and you'll be able to move forward in a healthy way. I am very serious about this. I am very complimentary about the program to anyone who cares to listen. We are now even looking corporately at the plan for our executives.

LM: Now that you've had time to reflect, how do you feel right now?

DW: I feel great. Played 18 holes of golf yesterday and 18 the day before ... I'm making up for lost time.

And, as a byproduct of all this, I have dropped those extra 15 pounds!

EXECUTIVE HEALTH PROGRAM, ATLANTIC HEALTH SYSTEM

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