

BULLETIN

## Uncovering the secrets of the heart

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**TILLY HISCOCK TAKES CARE OF HEARTS ...** both literally and metaphorically. As a Pacemaker Technologist at Burnaby Hospital, she sees patients once or twice a year to make sure their pacemakers are functioning properly. So in a way, her job revolves around this life-saving battery-operated biomedical device that keeps hearts beating steadily.

But Hiscock says that the real meaning of her work ... the part that lingers long after the appointments are over ... lies in the relationships she makes with her patients.

-I got into this field because it gives me direct care with my patients. Im the one they deal with; Im often the face of [cardiology] for them. My patients have a chronic problem with the rythym of their hearts. They are sick; most are elderly. Every time they see me they know someone is looking after them. They take great delight in coming here; thats the joy of the job for me.

-I have 764 patients, most of whom I see twice a year, and if they phone me I know by the sound of their voice who is on the phone. It surprises them when I say, "Oh, hello, Mr. M---, how are you?" says Hiscock.

-I have my patients for life. If I lose them it means they have succumbed to their illness," she continues. -So I get to know them on a personal level. They sometimes tell me stuff they wont tell anyone else. For example one man lost his wife to cancer. It was misdiagnosed and by the time they figured it out, it was too late. Hed come and talk to me about his anger and grief. Sometimes hed come in and cry. There were things he didnt tell his children that he would tell me."

Hiscock chose to move into her position (strictly speaking, her title is cardiology technologist with a pacemaker speciality) in 1992, precisely because she wanted this level of contact with patients. Shed been in the medical technology field for over a decade, starting out in her native Newfoundland in the late 1970s as a lab technologist.

She moved to BC in 1986 and found that her work was different in the context of a bigger hospital.

-I was in front of a machine all day and lost that patient connection," she says. She enrolled in BCITs correspondence program in Cardiology Technology, wrote her provincial and then national exams and moved to cardiology in 1990. When her current position opened up in 1992 she jumped at the chance to get back to more direct patient contact.

Hiscocks main task is to make sure the pacemaker is working properly for the patient. To do this, she uses a machine called a programmer (she has eight different ones, each specific to a certain type of pacemaker). This has a program head about the size of a human hand that she places on the patients skin over the pacemaker

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180 East Columbia  
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website  
[www.hsabc.org](http://www.hsabc.org)

Telephone 604-517-0994  
1-800-663-2017