

Wearing your health on your sleeve

Jacksonville woman's customized medical-alert bracelets can denote conditions, blood type, medications and even organ-donor status

By Buffy Pollock
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After suffering a heart attack and quadruple bypass, Jackson County resident Richard Lovie decided the medical-alert necklace he used to wear felt uncomfortably heavy bouncing around on his sore chest.

Another deterrent to wearing it was that the necklace offered limited medical information, denoting simply that Lovie suffered from diabetes, not that he was now a heart patient.

For his birthday, his wife presented him with an Italian charm-style bracelet listing all his vital medical and emergency contact information.

Made of square, stainless-steel links, the Medical Alert Link bracelet is the brainchild of Jacksonville resident Jocie Wall.

Having ventured into Italian charms a handful of Christmas seasons ago, Wall shifted gears two years ago and began offering the bracelets with customized medical information.

Lovie said his new bracelet provides peace of mind, and he appreciates that the information can be changed as often as necessary.

"It's a good, quality bracelet, and you can have anything on it you want," he said.

"My wife is going to get one. She has a rare blood type — she's RH negative — so she wants that on her bracelet. There's room enough to list all your medications and everything you would want someone to know in an emergency."

An upgrade to typical medical jewelry that denotes one or two major conditions, the bracelets can be customized with everything from blood type and organ-donor status to heart conditions and special medications.



"With these, you can add and remove your medical information, link by link," explained Wall, a counselor for a decade in Washington before moving to Oregon.

"The way it is most places, if people need a quality medical-alert bracelet, they send off in the mail and, once they get them engraved, they're permanently limited to whatever they had engraved.

"If they put on it that they're on blood thinners, then most bracelets are no longer good if they're taken off that medication," she said. "It's important for the information to be up to date."

Steve Boe, store manager for Black Oak Pharmacy in Medford, said the bracelets are far more appealing than most similar products. Boe offers flyers about the product inside his Medford store and hopes to sell the bracelets in the near future.

"The problem with medical bracelets that are available is two-fold — one is that they're cheaply made and turn your skin blue from the nickel. And, two, they're limited in what they say," said Boe.

Prime example: A diabetic patient might have two or three other conditions that would complicate typical treatment in an emergency, explained Boe.

Or a patient on medications that emergency medical personnel need to know about could have outdated information on their bracelet.

"They've got room for all your medical information and other factors, like blood type, and if you get put on a new medication or something changes, you just change the link," added Boe. "The market really needed something like this."

Wall has been offering the bracelets at Christmas and online for two years. This holiday season she was selling them from a kiosk at Rogue Valley Mall. Last week she found some office space in the old Spearco building at 330 N. Fir St., and she plans to begin moving in today.

She said she hopes to get the bracelets patented and into local stores and pharmacies within a year.

Base bracelets — 9 millimeters for women and 13 millimeters for men — cost \$20 and feature a red medical caduceus. Links, denoting everything from transplant status and blood type to emergency contact information and special medications, cost \$10 each.

Wall, who etches the specific medical labels onto the links herself, said she hopes to encourage individuals who are required to wear medical-alert jewelry to do so.

"People come up all the time who are supposed to wear a medical alert, and they're not," she said.

"It's been so rewarding. I've had people tell me that these bracelets have saved their lives. One man had an emergency, and the paramedics told him it was down to seconds, and all the important information was available right when they needed it," she said.

"If people are supposed to be wearing a medical alert, it's usually a matter of life and death that they have it on in the event of an emergency."

For details or to order a bracelet, see the website at www.medicalalertlink.com or call 541-899-3403.

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