

# Empowering patients with humor and a T-shirt

**An Illinois physician says medical T-shirts can help patients deal with illness.**

**Damon Adams**  
AMNEWS STAFF

SOME PEOPLE WEAR THEIR HEARTS on their sleeves. Westby Fisher, MD, likes patients to wear them on the front of a T-shirt.

Sporting a T-shirt with a catchy phrase helps empower patients over

their condition, raises awareness about illnesses and allows healing with a good laugh. That's the philosophy behind Med-Tees, the medical T-shirt company Dr. Fisher started with his wife.

For obsessive compulsives, there's a T-shirt with a pencil out of line with other office supplies and the words,



DR. FISHER

"Bother You?" Amputees have a shirt emblazoned with "Dude Where's My Leg?" And for patients with an implantable cardiac defibrillator, there's a heart with the phrase "Careful ... I'm Wired!"

"It's a prescription for your long-term health after you leave the hospital," said Dr. Fisher, director of cardiac electrophysiology at Evanston Northwestern Healthcare in suburban Chicago. "These are people who have a medical problem and are moving on. The hope is maybe the T-shirt will be a little inspirational."

The shirts also are a little charitable. Dr. Fisher said 10% of each shirt sold through his company's Web site (<http://www.cafepress.com/medtees/>) goes to charities that deal with illnesses the T-shirts reflect, such as cancer, arthritis and Crohn's disease.

Sales have continued to grow nationwide since Dr. Fisher and his wife Diane Fisher, PhD, a clinical psychologist, began MedTees in May 2005. They have sold about 1,000 shirts.

"The T-shirts strike to the core of what patients have to deal with everyday. It opens lines of communication. It opens awareness to diseases," Dr. Westby Fisher said.

He came up with the idea after

**The Fishers have more than 120 designs, many of which have been suggested by patients.**

reading a newspaper article about a man who pitched his Web site via a T-shirt. Dr. Fisher found a shirt maker and put up a Web site. Today, Med-Tees' wares include shirts, coffee mugs, caps and jogging outfits, ranging from \$12.99 to \$49.99.

Sometimes, T-shirt ideas occur to Dr. Fisher as he goes through everyday activities. A brainstorm may strike on his drive home. A clever concept may crystallize when he's talking to a patient or another doctor.

The Fishers have more than 120 designs, about half of which came from patients. Dr. Fisher said he hasn't had anyone say the shirts are inappropriate. Acceptance may have something to do with baby boomers' openness.

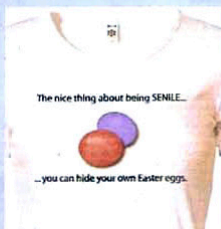
"They want things more on the table than past generations," Dr. Diane Fisher said. "The patients seem ready to do this."

Dwight Mensinger of San Jose, Calif., wears a sweatshirt with one of the most-popular slogans: "Death. Been there. Done that. Got the T-shirt." The cardiac-arrest survivor who had quadruple heart bypass surgery said he does it when he speaks about heart health at hospitals and schools. The T-shirt suits him well.

"Some people roll their eyes. Some people say, 'Are you into Goth or something,'" Mensinger said. "It's kind of hard to talk to someone about cardiac arrest, but when I wear the T-shirt, people come up and talk to me. It opens the door." ♦

## RAISING AWARENESS

Some patients find that talking about their chronic conditions is a little easier when their T-shirts break the ice.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. FISHER



Photography by Susi Dugan

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