

MEDICAL T-SHIRTS

A healthy dose of humor

"Death. Been there. Done that. Got the T-shirt."

Psychologist Helen Smith of Knoxville, Tenn., got the T-shirt with those exact words, and she says it has made all the difference in the world. When she was 37, Smith's heart stopped. Thankfully, her life didn't.

She had eaten right, worked out regularly and did karate, but all of that didn't prevent a heart attack and surgery to install an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) to keep her heart working correctly. She says she became depressed, and then she discovered www.medtees.com, a Web site developed by a Wilmette cardiologist and his wife, a clinical psychologist.

"The T-shirt made me feel better. It made my husband feel better that I could laugh at this," said Smith.

The MedTees T-shirts are the brainchild of Evanston Northwestern physician Wes Fisher and his wife, Diane. Fed up with a culture that they say resists the natural processes of aging and illness like leprosy, the Fishers' idea allows patients and people with illnesses to poke fun at their ailments.

"It's kind of a countercultural idea," Wes Fisher said in the kitchen of his home. "People in Western culture really don't think it's OK to have an illness or be sick. We have a media image of the perfect body."

The Fishers, who plan to turn the business into a non-profit as soon as it becomes self-supporting (they already donate 10 percent of every sale to charity), welcome suggestions from people to design new sayings and styles for the shirts. Other MedTees shirts with a hu-



Tribune photos by Tom Van Dyke

morous message that have been popular include:

"Got morphine?" for pain sufferers and cancer patients.

"One real, one fake. Guess which?" for mastectomy recipients.

"I'm A.D.D. Talk faster."

Prices range from \$12.99 to \$49.99 at www.medtees.com.

—Patrick Kampert



Wes and Diane Fisher, with daughter Alexandra, donate 10 percent of every sale of MedTees T-shirts to charity.