

# All conditions suited to a T

## No medical problem too serious for lighthearted MedTees

By **STEPHANIE FOSNIGHT**  
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**W**hen the young man who'd lost his leg in Iraq heard about Wes Fisher's humorous medical T-shirt company, the newly-retired veteran suggested a design idea.

"He said, 'How about: Dude, where's my leg?'" recalled Fisher.

Soon after, a "Dude, where's my leg?" shirt for amputees popped up on MedTees.com.

MedTees was founded in May by Wilmette residents Wes Fisher, M.D., a cardiologist, and his wife, Diane Fisher, a clinical psychologist. MedTees merchandise takes a light look at serious medical conditions.

"The one I really like is, 'Death: Been There, Done That,'" said Evanston resident Marsha Landau, a sudden cardiac death survivor. "I did check with my family to make sure they would not be too concerned to be seen with me in that T-shirt, but they think it's funny."

Landau was onstage during a Northwestern University panel presentation when she collapsed seven years ago.

"People thought I was falling asleep," Landau said. "When I looked like I was going to hit the deck, they realized I wasn't just dozing off."

Several doctors in the audience rushed to Landau's aid, and although the paramedics didn't arrive for 10 minutes, the doctors performed tag-team CPR to keep oxygen flowing to Landau's brain. She was finally revived after seven shocks from a defibrillator.

"I was in pretty bad shape for a few days and that's why I asked my family how they felt," Landau said. But her family agrees that the T-shirt fits Landau's personality.

"I think part of why I recovered so well has to do with my attitude and being upbeat and positive," she said.

Landau also wears her shirt proudly in order to raise awareness as she campaigns for more external automatic defibrillators in public places.

"I'll tell anybody who will listen that I'm a sudden death survivor, because I think it's important to talk about it," she said. "Upwards of a quarter million people die from sudden cardiac death each year."

The Fishers also hope that the shirts help remove some of the stigma associated with chronic illness, especially for the person who's undergone a serious illness or diagnosis.



Julie Fabozzick/Staff Photographer

Wilmette residents Diane and Wes Fisher are amazed by the response to their new company MedTees.com. They get orders and design suggestions from people around the world who are dealing with chronic illness.



Julie Fabozzick/Staff Photographer

MedTees designs are also available on hats, mugs, bumper stickers and other merchandise.

"What happens to cardiac patients after the implantable device goes in?" said Wes Fisher.

"There's a lot of people trying to deal, in a silent way, with what's going on. This is just a simple way to break the ice and facilitate communication."

"They have it for the rest of their life," said Diane Fisher. "It's always there. Or, like with cancer, it can be gone but not forgotten. It's that long-term coping that's not at the front of the news."

Kori Faulkner was a 14-year-old at band camp when she collapsed from cardiac arrest.

"I just fell down in the cafeteria," said Faulkner, now 26 and living in Mundelein. "My counselors did two-man CPR."

The paramedics came and used a new defibrillator they'd been trained on just days before to revive Faulkner. Her doctors then discovered that she has Long QT Syndrome, an abnormality of the heart's electrical system.

In the last 12 years, Faulkner has undergone six surgeries to implant and remove six internal defibrillators. She takes a host of medications and has experienced 15 shocks from her devices.

"Unfortunately, it hurts," she said. "The first time, I felt like I had just been hit by a car."

Faulkner is part of an online support group for QT patients, and when she told them about her new "QT Cutie" T-shirt, the group went wild for MedTees.

"We're always talking about the shirts," said Faulkner, who also has a "Danger: High Voltage Defibrillator" sweatshirt. "It's almost like a fashion directory."

Faulkner is

disappointed that nobody's asked her yet what the "QT Cutie" shirt means, but says she hasn't worn it much yet in public.

"We'd like to get the message out for all of these other people who don't have celebrities for their diseases and get the word out that it's OK to have chronic illness," Wes Fisher said. "Illness happens."

"If you're a middle-life North Shore adult, this is not a working assumption, that illness happens," Diane Fisher said. "Then you get blindsided by it."

The Fishers are seeking non-profit status for their company and already donate a portion of each sale to the applicable charity. Wes Fisher designs the shirts on his computer, and they work with Internet manufacturers and distributors to create and sell them.

Their list of designs is continually growing, especially since customers are invited to submit ideas and provide links to other online resources.

"Through our Web site, people can connect," Wes Fisher said.

Fisher, a Navy reservist, travels to Bethesda each month to treat Iraq veterans. That's where he met the young amputee who suggested the "Dude, where's my leg?" shirt.

"He's gone through rehab, he's getting fitted for a prosthetic device, he's learning how to walk on that leg," Wes Fisher said. "He is one strong guy."

"And that's healthy," added Diane Fisher. "He is moving on."

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