

AUGUST 2010: **MEDICALERT** Month

MedicAlert Foundation is one of the largest nonprofit membership organizations in the world, with a mission to protect and save lives.

The MedicAlert® story began in 1953, when a 14-year old girl, the daughter of a surgeon, cut her finger and was taken to a local emergency room for treatment. Her uncle, also a physician, performed a simple test on the young girl before giving her the usual dose of tetanus anti-toxin (commonly given to persons who have suffered a cut or puncture wound). Seconds later, the girl went into anaphylactic shock, a potentially fatal reaction to a severe allergy.

After spending several days in the hospital, she recovered, but there was (and is) no drug to cure such an allergy. That incident made the young lady and her family very aware of her vulnerability. "My parents realized that if one tiny drop of the antitoxin had produced that reaction, I'd probably be killed by a full dose," she recalled. "After that, when I went away from home for a weekend or to a neighboring town for school events, they'd make me wear a paper bracelet describing my allergies."

When the young lady graduated from high school and headed for college, her parents knew that a more permanent solution than a paper bracelet was needed. They designed a metal bracelet, with the medical symbol of the caduceus (coiled snakes on a staff) and red lettering spelling out "MEDICALERT" on the front, and "allergic to tetanus antitoxin" engraved on the back. A jeweler in San Francisco then crafted the bracelet. As people noticed the young lady's bracelet and asked how they might get one for themselves or a loved one, the doctor realized that many people with special medical problems might benefit as well, since improper diagnosis and treatment can cost lives.

In 1956, the doctor established MedicAlert Foundation International, a nonprofit, tax-exempt charitable organization, investing his own money and contributing countless hours of volunteer time... in the early years, the mail room for the organization was reported to be the family living room! That same year, the physician brothers attended the Congress of the American College of Surgeons in San Francisco: they brought 200 MedicAlert® bracelets and a small engraving machine and demonstrated its use to the physicians attending the conference. "I think," the surgeon said, "I can save more lives with MedicAlert® than I'll ever save with my scalpel!"

In the 1960's, MedicAlert Foundation was relocated to a local hospital, phone numbers were assigned, and a program was launched to provide details on each person's medical history by phone contact from

emergency medical workers. The organization received its first nationwide publicity through a supplement in the Sunday editions of 40 major U.S. newspapers.

By 1970, MedicAlert® was launching its first computerized automation of member records, allowing it to increase its membership ten-fold. Alliances were established with other medical organizations, and it earned the endorsements of three of the most influential associations in emergency medical care. In 1979, actor Ed Asner was named the foundation's National Volunteer Chairman. Actor Lorne Greene followed Mr. Asner as Volunteer Chairman.

By 1982, MedicAlert accepted an invitation to create a formal working relationship with the World Health Organization, and an international movement began. It has continued to expand globally, so that MedicAlert® members are afforded 24-hour emergency response to relay vital medical information to emergency personnel – secure (confidential) data is contained in a personal health record, and can be transmitted by phone, fax or any internet-connected computer – the emergency response center even provides translator services when necessary!

Bracelets and necklace pendants are available for as little as \$9.95 (the "designer series" can run over \$100!); first year enrollment for the services is \$39.95, and \$25 per year thereafter.

As one member testified, "In July 2000, I fell asleep while driving, flew 50 feet over a dry creek bed and ended up pinned under the steering wheel. Two days later, I woke up hearing a surgeon telling me I'd broken my back. He said I was lucky to have a MedicAlert® bracelet because it prevented the doctor from ordering an MRI, which would have been fatal since I have a pacemaker. MedicAlert® provides emergency information by a 24-hour hotline that gives doctors all the information that cannot fit on the bracelet, and they notify the contact person you have listed... A godsend!"

If you or a loved one has critical medical information that must be known to your caregivers – whenever, wherever you might need care – think about enrolling in such an important, life-saving service, or ask your doctor how else you can assure that such information is available in emergencies.



**MedicAlert® can be reached by calling
1-888-633-4298
Or visiting www.medicalert.org**