



California  
CHAPTER

# THE PASSING OF SUPREME COURT JUSTICE ANTONIN SCALIA DURING AMERICAN HEART MONTH

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**February 14, 2016** - February, as American Heart Month, is meant to remind us the disease is the #1 killer of Americans and there is so many ways to prevent cardiovascular disease.

The unfortunate passing of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia during American Heart Month is an unfortunate reminder that heart disease remains a major public health problem here in the United States and the industrialized world. His passing is also a reminder that one of the common manifestations of heart disease, sudden death occurs with no preceding symptoms. In the case of Justice Antonin, reports suggest that he had been enjoying a hunting trip and retired to bed feeling fine. Unfortunately, he died in his sleep. It is possible that his passing could have been prevented.

Risk factors for coronary artery disease include elevated cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking history and having family members with a history of heart disease. In the United States, we are fortunate to have technology such as coronary calcium scanning and coronary CT angiography that allows for the early identification of coronary artery disease before it leads to sudden cardiac death, heart attack, heart failure and the need for coronary artery bypass surgery and coronary stents. Early identification allows for early intervention with important lifestyle modifications including regular exercise, a heart healthy diet and weight loss if one is overweight. Proven lifesaving therapies including statins that reduce cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke and aspirin that prevents blood clots from forming in the arteries to arteries bringing blood flow to the heart and brain. Newer therapies have also been developed to further reduce cholesterol such as the PCSK9 inhibitors.

So lets not let the passing of Justice Scalia be in vein and instead make it into a teaching moment. Prevent the event by understanding your risk of developing cardiovascular disease, taking advantage of technologies that can identify heart disease before events such as sudden death, live a heart healthy lifestyle and comply with life saving therapies your physician may prescribe. If there are questions regarding your cardiovascular risk and best therapies, seek out your primary care provider or a cardiologist with the special designation as Fellow of the American College of Cardiology (FACC).

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