

[MUSIC PLAYING]

DR. RICHARD STERN: Hello, I'm Dr. Richard Stern, a cardiologist with John Muir Health. What I'd like to talk about today is the fact that heart rhythm disturbances can sometimes mask as panic attacks. Over the years, I've seen many patients who have been diagnosed as having panic attacks where an individual will feel the onset suddenly of a racing heartbeat, anxiety, and shortness of breath. While panic attacks are a real entity, sometimes it is a primary heart rhythm disturbance that occurs causing the anxiety, the rapid heart-- the palpitations, and the shortness of breath.

In patients where this is the case, it's a tragedy if it's not identified because there are well-tolerated medications to control the arrhythmia. And there are also catheter-based therapies, where an electrophysiology study is done to identify the mechanism of the arrhythmia. And then an ablation performed where the small area of heart muscle that is responsible for the rhythm abnormality can be burned away and, thus, curing the rhythm abnormality for good. If you are a patient with panic attacks, ask your doctor about the possibility of a heart rhythm disorder as the source of your symptoms.