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Spirit of Women HeartCaring Case Study
Physicians Engaged for HeartCaring Success
AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness, Atlantic City, NJ

AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness and Cardiovascular Service Line utilized HeartCaring® a national heart-health education and resource program administered by the Spirit of Women Hospital Network, to establish new vascular-focused programs, enhance relationships with local primary care physicians and work towards achieving Center of Excellence status – all in the interest of significantly enhancing AtlantiCare's ability to meet the heart health needs of its diverse community.

What is HeartCaring®?

HeartCaring is a national certification program by Spirit of Women indicating excellence in gender-sensitive cardiovascular care. The program supports hospitals to improve heart health in their community while profitably integrating hospital and physician clinical and outreach initiatives.

HeartCaring involves a three-prong approach to planning and implementation that includes hospitals, clinicians, consumers, government agencies and corporate partners in an effort to increase awareness and reduce cardiovascular disease in women. The growing body of research reveals an under-diagnosis of heart disease in women as well as variations in clinical indicators, symptoms, and treatment regimens, underscoring the need for a gender-sensitive approach to cardiovascular medicine. HeartCaring offers professional education and outreach, clinical excellence and consumer education – all in an effort to facilitate action around the identification and treatment of heart disease and peripheral arterial disease (P.A.D.) in women.

HeartCaring partnerships include the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute: the Heart Truth campaign, the Peripheral Arterial Disease Coalition, the American Vascular Association, Legs for Life, and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: Stay in Circulation campaign.

Heart disease continues to be the number one cause of death among women, yet studies demonstrate that women do not prioritize heart disease as a health risk for themselves. Indeed, many clinicians still do not recognize heart disease as the leading cause of death in women and there continues to be differences in the way women and men are evaluated and treated for heart disease, even with the same symptoms. Women also tend to present with non-classic heart disease symptoms that frequently go unrecognized by healthcare providers. Medical professionals and women need to become more aware of the signs and symptoms of cardiovascular disease and to take action for improved health.

Physicians Engaged for HeartCaring Success: AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness, Atlantic City, NJ

Situation Overview:

In 2005, AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness contracted with a consulting firm to evaluate community health needs in the areas they serve. The geographic and demographic assessment demonstrated need for increased capacity for heart services due to current and future predicted population surges. Forty-six percent of the population in AtlantiCare's service vicinity in Southeastern New Jersey older than 45 years of age. Additionally, the development of more urgent care, family practice and drugstore-based clinics required that AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness and Cardiovascular Services be prepared to treat community members with heart disease that are referred from these sources.

Objective:

- Expand services to meet needs of local community, a demographic of 3.2 million, through the development of full-service, integrated diagnostic and treatment cardiovascular services, to include the addition of a wound center and hyperbaric chamber.
- Achieve the Cardiovascular Center of Excellence designation to become known as a leader in women's cardiovascular health, presently in progress.
- Integrate multidisciplinary key service lines to encourage cross-marketing opportunities, particularly for the new vascular programs.

Tactics:

AtlantiCare's Cardiovascular Service Line, together with Spirit of Women's HeartCaring program, resolved to achieve its objectives through the development of a comprehensive heart and vascular program. First, health system administration identified and appointed key individuals to help drive program development and execution: They designated a dynamic and committed registered nurse to drive the success of the program within the local community, established a multidisciplinary Vascular Committee to design the expansion of the heart and vascular programs, and recruited a female cardiologist as medical director and women's heart disease coordinator for the AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness Heart Center. The Women's Health service line collaborated closely with Cardiology in partnership to recruit the female cardiologist, demonstrating their shared commitment to reducing heart disease in women. AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness features a Total Women's Care concept, where women can schedule their appointments in one location and in one day. Adding access to a female cardiologist and heart care alongside other healthcare providers makes it clear in the consumer's mind that heart health is important, and can be easily accessible.

The RN HeartCaring coordinator, who is also the health system's Chest Pain Coordinator, immediately began using turnkey HeartCaring resources and tools to engage physicians, employees, and community members in the program and invite participation. She also scheduled meetings with local primary care physicians and the hospital staff to engage them in continuing medical education programs focusing on gender-specific medicine, current best practices, and evidence-based research.

Once physicians were engaged, the coordinator began conducting P.A.D. screenings in the offices of HeartCaring certified primary care physicians (carotid scan for blockages, Aortic Abdominal Aneurysm scan, and Arterial Brachial Index for P.A.D.). These screenings provided a win-win for the health system and for the individual physicians; physicians provide a value added service to their patients (at no charge) and have the opportunity to bring in new patients, and the health system develops a deeper relationship with physicians, as well as the potential for referrals. Physicians needed only to provide an exam room and to refer patients into the screenings. AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness provided the advertising, scheduling, portable equipment, and vascular certified ultrasound technician to conduct the screenings. The RN followed up with patients and collected data. In exchange for clinical assistance with the screening program, AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness rewarded staff nurses with Clinical Ladder Points (continuing education incentives toward promotion and compensation).

AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness utilized the HeartCaring curriculum and printed resources to re-educate their clinical staff during the re-accreditation process for their Chest Pain Center.

AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness and the RN HeartCaring Coordinator marketed the availability of P.A.D. screenings through billboards, the hospital intranet, women's centers, female professors at local colleges, two-month calendar direct mailers, and local TV interviews. The RN also collaborated with the physician liaison nurse, who integrates new physicians into the health system and produces the health system's staff newsletter, to educate them about the HeartCaring program, Continuing Medical Education programs and available screenings.

Finally, AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness sponsored several fun community events to further engage local residents and medical staff in the HeartCaring program and its various components, and to enhance the heart health of the local community. Two hundred fifty people attended the 2006 Day of Dance for Heart Health, and 134 attended a Red Dress Luncheon featuring as models community women of all ages who were survivors of heart disease.

Results:

- P.A.D. screenings have been provided in physician practices. Of women screened, 42% were found to be at moderate or high risk for P.A.D. Among all community members screened through the physician offices, 5 percent were found to have blocked carotid arteries, and one patient had an aortic aneurysm. All patients required immediate treatment.
- The HeartCaring Coordinator has a screening database to further study aggregate trends among patients screened. Specific patient data is not stored in the database to protect patient privacy in accordance with HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act).
- With appropriate and early identification of elevated patient risks and immediate referral from primary care physicians, AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness can respond to community heart health needs by having the most current vascular services, technologies, and trained physicians prepared to treat patients.
- Denise Nachodsky, MD, the female cardiologist and medical director, provided leadership and clinical expertise for both the medical community and consumers in Atlantic City. As an enthusiastic spokesperson, Dr. Nachodsky personified the importance of taking action for heart health. Female patients feel they can easily relate to her.

- Because of AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness's national affiliation between Spirit of Women hospital network and the P.A.D. Coalition, they have been recognized as a National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's Stay in Circulation Campaign flagship market to participate in the national effort to raise awareness of P.A.D.

Evaluation:

Through the HeartCaring program, AtlantiCare Women's Health and Wellness and Cardiovascular Service Line:

- Accessed unique populations who would benefit from heart disease and P.A.D. screenings, particularly women >45 years of age identified to be at higher risk by physician.
- Helped primary care physicians be successful in identifying and managing heart disease in their practices through improving physician risk stratification skills, using effective patient education tools, and appropriately referring for screening and/or treatment to the hospital.
- Provided a high level of consumer accessibility, allowing physicians to refer or patients to self-refer for the screening at no charge.
- Identified patients who did not have a doctor and referred them to HeartCaring-trained primary care providers.
- Has been awarded grants and recognition from providers and utilizes the HeartCaring program in the pursuit of Center of Excellence designations and the re-accreditation of their Chest Pain Center.