

SPECIAL REPORT

HEALTHY LIVING. HEART AND DIABETES CARE

Doctors take mission to heart

Texsan Hospital trying to help more people bypass cardiovascular disease

BY CATHERINE DOMINGUEZ

It is no big secret what keeps the Texsan Heart Hospital ticking.

Built on a patient focused care model, doctors and nurses at the heart specialty hospital pride themselves on making hospital stays as comfortable as possible for both patients and their families.

The specialty heart hospital got its jump start from a group of local doctors about eight years ago with the goal to focus heavily on cardiac care.

"Through the years, I have worked in all the hospitals in town," says Dr. J. Marvin Smith III, a surgeon with Cardio Thoracic Surgical Associates. "In 2000, it became apparent that cardiac care in San Antonio was not what it should be."

While most of the local facilities had cardiac divi-

sions, none of them had made heart disease, which continues to be the leading cause of death among both men and women, their sole focus.

According to Smith, that group of about 70 local physicians joined forces and contacted North Carolina-based MedCath Corp. After a few meetings, the two groups ultimately created a partnership to build the hospital.

MedCath owns and operates nine hospitals across the U.S. through partnerships with physicians. It also owns and/or manages 20 cardiac diagnostic and therapeutic facilities across the nation.

Today, Texsan Heart Hospital has hit several milestones by offering new technologies including the HeartSaver CT to diagnose heart disease, expanding from its initial 60 beds to 120 beds and receiving a Cardiac Care Excellence award for 2009 from Health Grades, an independent health care rating company based in Colorado.

Founded in 2004, the \$75 million hospital, including land and assets, features four operating suites, four cardiac catheterization labs, a 10-bed day patient area and a cardiovascular emergency department.



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Instead of moving patients as they recover, Texsan Heart Hospital moves the necessary equipment in and out of a patient's room.

The hospital has over 400 physicians and more than 325 staff members.

"The hospital has certainly exceeded our expectations," says A. Charles Rabinowitz, a cardiologist with South Texas Cardiovascular Consultants and one of the hospital's founders. "We knew that if we could get quality physicians to work here, we could have a quality product."

Outside the mold

While MedCath had the basic design for a cardiac focused hospital, Rabinowitz says the doctors made sure they were involved in designing the culture of the facility.

"What sets Texsan apart is that the doctors have an equal voice at the top level of governance," Rabinowitz explains. "So the doctors participate in how the hospital is run."

Rabinowitz says the doctors weigh in on all aspects on how the hospital is operating including its philosophy and staffing. The Texsan board of directors is comprised of both physicians and representatives from MedCath.

"The doctors were involved in every step (of the creation of the hospital)..." Smith says. "(Being a part of the governing body) enables us to



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Dr. J. Marvin Smith III was one of 70 San Antonio physicians that created a partnership with MedCath Corp. to open Texsan Heart Hospital.

TEXSAN: Noninvasive scan spots plaque

really have input on what our focus should be.”

The doctors are also involved with the clinical committees at the hospital. Smith says that involvement is important to quickly address any needs or issues that come up at the hospital.

“From my standpoint, it is important for the physicians to be our partners as we run this hospital,” says Craig Desmond, president and CEO of Texsan. “Regardless if the physician has ownership or not, my management style is that we partner to run the hospital and do what’s best for the patients. We are going to continue that methodology, it’s important.”

In addition to overseeing the governance of the hospital, Smith says the physicians also believed it was important that all the rooms in the facility had the ability to be converted to address a patient’s individual needs, including intensive care services. Also unique to Texsan is that the nurses work on a one-to-one ratio with the hospital’s most critical patients.

“By having this universal room, the patient comes to their room and as they get better the only thing that changes is we might remove some monitors off the wall and the nursing ratio may change,” he says. “What we don’t have are patients on a gurney, rolling out of ICU, down a hallway where the nurses don’t know them.”

Smith adds the continuity of care is a key part of a patient’s recovery.

“We bring the staffing, equipment and resources to the patient in the room,” says Wayne A. Kipp, vice president of business development for Texsan. “Patients like it better because they aren’t wondering where they are going next.”

Rabinowitz says he, along with his fellow physicians, wanted to ensure both the patient and families were happy and comfortable. He says the hospital also allows family members to visit at any time of the day and even provides a bed in the patient’s room for a family member to say around the clock.

“This is the most efficient way to do things,” Rabinowitz says. “The patients get better care.”

Earlier detection

According to the Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics 2009 Update released by the American Heart Association (AHA) this month, nearly 2,400 people across the nation die each day from cardiovascular disease. More staggering, the AHA estimated 785,000 Americans will have a new coronary attack in 2009 and about 470,000 will have a repeat attack.

However, as daunting as those numbers may seem, researchers from the AHA also note that the death rate from cardiovascular disease has declined slightly in the last few years.

Texsan Heart Hospital hopes to contribute to an even further decline.

The hospital recently acquired a HeartSaver CT with the goal of preventing more heart



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Valarie Fragozo, a radiology technician at Texsan, points out the different views created by the HeartSaver CT scan that help diagnose plaque buildup in and around a patient’s heart.

attacks. Using no needles, no dyes and no injections, the heart disease risk assessment test can uncover heart disease in less than seven minutes — years before a person has any symptoms.

“We have run hundreds of people through here,” Smith says. “Most people (get the HeartSaver CT scan) thinking everything is OK. But for a good amount of them, there is a problem and they have not had any symptoms.”

According to Valarie Fragozo, a radiology technician at Texsan, the HeartSaver can detect even the smallest calcium deposits, or plaque, around the heart. Depending on the amount detected, the staff will recommend that person see a cardiologist of their choosing or refer them to a physician on staff at Texsan for treatment.

“(Heart disease can be) diagnosed before a catastrophe occurs,” Smith says. “It is a test that people can choose for themselves rather than having to have doctors orders for it.”

Smith says the doctors priced the procedure at \$99 to make it affordable to everyone — with or without insurance or doctor referrals.

V. Seenu Reddy, M.D., with the local chapter of the AHA, says as heart disease continues to be so prevalent in our society, facilities like Texsan can serve an important purpose.

“Texsan can offer patients convenience and one-stop shopping,” he says. “I think that is a good thing.”

Reddy, who is also an assistant professor of surgery with the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio, says along with Texsan, there are several other facilities in town that also provide quality cardiac services.

Expanding services

While both doctors and administrators say the focus of Texsan will no doubt continue to be



cardiac related, the hospital is looking to expand its reach in the future.

“The DNA of the hospital will always be cardiac care but we have the ability to take care of other acute illnesses as well,” Kipp says.

“This is a full service facility,” Rabinowitz adds. “We do a lot of other stuff besides taking care of hearts here.”

In fact, doctors at Texsan have been performing bariatric surgery for about six months. The surgery is performed on obese patients to create a small stomach pouch to limit the amount of food that the patient can eat. “That’s a good fit in the sense that those patients all get cardiac evaluations before surgery,” Smith says. “They do represent a higher risk for cardiopulmonary complications.”

Rabinowitz says it makes sense for Texsan to reach into other areas over the next few years. He also says the hospital is working on research in several areas, including women’s heart health and congenital heart defects.

“We have the patient volume to do research,” Rabinowitz says. “It is keeping us on our toes.”