

Heart To Heart

Eisenhower Unites with Cardiologists to Optimize Cardiac Care

By: Roxanne Jones



In a move designed to provide valley residents with the highest quality and most efficient cardiac care, Desert Cardiology Center and Eisenhower Medical Center have forged an alliance to create Eisenhower Desert Cardiology Center.

"The country as a whole is concerned about the costs and quality of health care delivery," says Barry Hackshaw, MD, FACC, one of the founders of Desert Cardiology Center which, with 14 Board Certified Cardiologists, is the largest private practice cardiology group in the Coachella Valley. Dr. Hackshaw serves as Medical Director of Interventional Cardiology and the Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory at Eisenhower.

"To me, the best delivery models are facilities like the Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic and Palo Alto Clinic, where hospitals and physicians work together in a united way," he continues. "Before coming to the desert, I was at another medical center where we were all under one umbrella. All decisions were made in a coordinated way between the hospital and the physicians. That's the model we're aiming for here."

Eisenhower President and Chief Executive Officer G. Aubrey Serfling concurs, pointing to Scripps Clinic in San Diego as another successful model of hospital-physician integration in which some physicians are employed by the Scripps Foundation while others remain in private practice.

"In California, hospitals can't hire physicians directly, but they can create alignments through a medical foundation structure, which is what we're doing here at Eisenhower with Desert Cardiology Center," he says. "So for all practical purposes, we are part of the same health care system."

"Still other physicians and medical groups remain in private practice," Serfling adds. "We're respectful of both models."

Through this new agreement, the newly renamed Eisenhower Desert Cardiology Center will now manage the hospital's non-invasive cardiology service, the catheterization and electrophysiology labs, the congestive heart failure clinic and cardiac rehabilitation.

"It is now a coordinated effort between our physicians and Eisenhower administrators to provide optimal patient care and to collaborate on innovative cardiac research and technology," says Dr. Hackshaw.

"Because we're on the same team, we'll analyze purchases together to ensure we're making wise choices," says Andrew Rubin, MD, FACC, who serves as Co-Director of the Electrophysiology Laboratory. He is also Director of Cardiology Education for Eisenhower's Internal Medicine Residency Program.

In today's health care environment, achieving operational efficiencies is critical for the long-term viability of hospitals and physicians.

"Additionally," says Serfling, "In the world of hospitals and private practice, sometimes doctors want to have their own imaging or surgery centers, for example, which competes with the hospital and duplicates services. But when you're all part of the same system, the potential for these kinds of conflicts is eliminated."

"Our successes are tied together," adds Dr. Rubin.

"As part of our commitment to the Medical Center, we're also involved in establishing quality guidelines for cardiac care and actively monitoring results to produce the best-possible patient outcomes," Dr. Hackshaw says. "Payers are increasingly basing reimbursement on results, so we're working with Eisenhower to exceed national standards for quality care. In addition, by coordinating our resources, we are now able to provide the same quality care at a reduced cost."

"We're also trying to standardize protocols so that cardiologists are doing things in a relatively uniform manner," he continues. "It's been shown that you can improve results if you treat medical problems in a consistent, evidence-based way."

Dr. Hackshaw also believes that there will be improved exchange of patients' medical information. "We now have direct, electronic access to all Eisenhower Medical Center medical records," he explains. "So if a patient comes into the office and has had a previous test at Eisenhower, I can assess the test results within seconds on my computer, improving physician decision-making based on more comprehensive medical information."

"We're also working with the hospital to enhance cardiac research," says Dr. Rubin. "And we're getting involved in medical education through Eisenhower's new residency program," he adds, another example of the two entities' shared goals.

Dr. Hackshaw was instrumental in bringing this collaboration between the hospital and the medical practice to fruition. "Sometimes this kind of change can fracture a group, but each of the Desert Cardiology physicians felt strongly that this alignment made sense, and is committed to the transition," he says. "When the overall vision is correct, it overrides any personal agendas, and people remain dedicated to the greater good."

The greater good in this case is the heart health of Coachella Valley residents.

"This is a long-term commitment to provide the best possible cardiac care to the valley," says Dr. Hackshaw.

"And by teaming with Eisenhower Medical Center, the community can feel confident that they'll receive the highest-quality care in the most cost-effective manner," adds Dr. Rubin.