

Cath lab exceeds many expectations

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Ahead of Heart Health Month in February, J.C. Blair Memorial Hospital is celebrating the success of the heart catheterization lab, which has helped serve those with heart issues in Huntingdon County for the past eight months.



Dr. Michael Sabatini, medical director of the heart catheterization lab, said the facility has been much more successful than even the most aggressive predictions made before it opened in May 2017.

“We’ve had over 400 people come in for heart catheterizations since May,” said Sabatini. “The most aggressive predictions by an outside firm said we would do one fifth of that, so we’ve exceeded those expectations five times over.”

Sabatini said the expectations underestimated the prevalence of heart disease in the area.

Additionally, Sabatini said the cath lab has seen other successful procedures, including peripheral vascular disease and performing surgery to insert pacemakers into patients who need them.

“We’re also seeing more patients in the outpatient center (of the cath lab), which is open five days a week,” he said. “We’re also available seven days a week for inpatient consultations.”

The lab also treats at least one ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction (ST-EMI), essentially a heart attack, a week, in addition to having inserted at least 100 stents since May.

“I think with the echocardiograms, stress tests and subsequent cardiac rehab with one of the only area certified cardiac rehab nurses in the area, we have very strong points that allow patients to be treated here,” said Sabatini.

Being treated at J.C. Blair Memorial Hospital also means that patients don’t have to travel for care.

“The number of patients we’re transferring is fewer, and this also means that families can visit their patients here,” said Sabatini. “Even if we do have to transfer them, we have the means to stabilize them here before they’re transferred to another facility.”

The next goal of the cath lab, according to Sabatini, is to expand in terms of pooling patients from surrounding areas.

“We can try to refer them to us so they don’t have to go to other places,” said Sabatini.

The community has been overwhelmingly supportive of the cath lab, so much so that the Juniata Valley Boys’ Basketball Team Boosters have coordinated a fundraiser to support the cardiac care center at J.C. Blair Memorial Hospital beginning at 4 p.m. with the junior high game Friday, Feb. 2. The junior varsity team will play at 6 p.m. and the varsity will play at 7:30 p.m.

Krista Reihart, the chairperson for the booster committee, said the team wanted to do something similar to the Pink Zone games.

“We wanted to do something to give back to the community,” she said. “I thought of the cath lab, so we reached out to the hospital to see if we could do something that would benefit the facility. We also knew that February was Heart Health Month, so we thought it would be a good time to give back.”

Reihart also noted many of the players on the boys’ basketball team know someone close to them who have been impacted by heart disease.

There will be raffles and games going on between the junior varsity and varsity games and representatives from J.C. Blair Memorial Hospital will be there to educate people about heart health.

Sabatini said benefits like this are just one example of how the community has supported the cath lab since it opened.

“I’m thrilled about the game,” said Sabatini. “Something like this goes a long way in saying how people are behind these services in the community.”

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