

Our Ongoing Journey to Improve Heart Health
By: Rebecca Moore

Whenever I do outreach at community health fairs or education in the schools or guest speak at a senior center, I provide the following information:

- Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of all adults in the United States.
- Every 40 seconds, someone in the United States has a heart attack.
- Every minute someone dies of a heart attack.

These facts are the reason the Big Island requires interventional cardiac services that stop heart attacks in progress by reestablishing and maintaining blood flow to the heart with ballooning and stenting. We are now able to save more lives and better reduce the possibility of long-term disability in heart attack survivors.

I am beyond overjoyed that our hospital worked hard to build our cardiology services by upgrading the cath lab and staff, recruiting a full slate of cardiologists and expanding our Progressive Care Unit. By the end of this year, we will be offering cardiac rehabilitation to our community, an additional offering to our well-attended Ornish Lifestyle Medicine program to reverse cardiac disease.

Just this time last year, we could only treat heart attack sufferers by administering clot busting medication and arrange for them to be flown to Oahu for their interventions. Upon waiting for emergency transport, I had the heartbreaking duty of having to tell those patients' loved ones to say their "goodbyes" because we didn't know if the patients would make it in time to Oahu.

Compounding the emergency is families not having the financial resources to afford flight and lodging to be with their loved ones. It is lonely and scary to be the patient without family support by their side. It is nerve-racking for loved ones to be home and wait for a hopeful outcome.

I am humbled to be able to say that now we have the capability to treat our family, friends and neighbors right here at our hospital and close to their homes.

We welcomed our first cardiologist, Dr. Carl Juneau, in January. He started to treat emergency heart attacks in March. Dr. Jamison Wyatt joined in April, and Dr. James Smith followed in June. By July, we were providing around-the-clock, full-time heart attack care. That same month, nurse practitioner Terri Vrooman joined the team, followed by Dr. TJ Sawyer.

Since Jan. 8 through Nov. 1, we've performed more than 300 catheterizations to look into the arteries leading to the heart. Nearly half of the time we go in, our cardiologists inserted one or more stents to clear and maintain blood flow to the heart. It is not an

Published Sunday, December 8, 2019

exaggeration to say some of these heart attack survivors would not be with their loved ones today if we did not have these services at Hilo Medical Center.

Already our one and only cardiac cath lab is used at full capacity from morning to night. Now we are at the point in our cardiology program that requires a second cath lab. One of our hospital's top priorities in the coming year includes building that second cath lab to ensure cardiac care for East Hawaii and the rest of the island.

Beyond our efforts to improve cardiac services in our community, I champion heart health and prevention efforts to avoid a heart attack. These efforts start by having regular checkups with your primary care physician and cardiologist to diagnose and monitor your condition.

Also, please take your family history of heart disease seriously. Only you can prevent your heart attack, which is why our hospital supports Community First's upcoming "Know Your Numbers" campaign. Your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and body mass index/weight are indicators that tell the story of your heart health.

If you would like me to come speak at your school or organization, please email me at rmoores1@hpsc.org.

Rebecca Moore, RN, is the heart attack and stroke coordinator at Hilo Medical Center.

This column was prepared by Community First, a nonprofit organization led by KTA's Barry Taniguchi and supported by a volunteer board of community leaders.

