

EXCLUSIVE: Greater Cincinnati startup to hire two dozen heart doctors

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CardioSolution, a Blue Ash startup that specializes in providing around-the-clock cardiac care for regional hospitals, plans to hire up to two dozen heart doctors as it expands operations in Ohio and other states.



For example, doctors are being added to help CardioSolution provide cardiac care at Clinton Memorial Hospital in Wilmington, which is launching a new catheterization laboratory program May 1.

The cardiologists will be able to treat patients suffering from heart attacks, or the doctors might perform diagnostic tests to determine the

best treatment for troublesome symptoms such as shortness of breath.

Clinton Memorial Hospital is about a one-hour drive north of downtown Cincinnati, so having cardiologists on site could be a life-saver for some patients who live in the Wilmington area.

"As is a typical model for us, we will have two physicians who will rotate seven days on and seven days off," said Mike Vanderwoude, president of CardioSolution. "They cover the hospital for 24 hours while there, and then they get seven days off."

"We'll also have four to five other physicians that are licensed and credentialed at that hospital, and they will be able to step in on holidays and other times when things come up and the main physicians can't cover," Vanderwoude told me during an exclusive interview.

"The core of the value of what we're offering is a 24/7 guarantee," Vanderwoude said. "We're responsible for covering 24 hours a day. For a hospital to have enough staff and backup to do that is very difficult."

CardioSolution has a staff of 16 at its Blue Ash headquarters and 50 employees in other locations.

The firm, which was established in 2011, employs 40 physicians across the country. Of those, 25 are full-time and on-call 24/7 at the hospitals. The other 15 are part-timers who fill in for weekends, vacations and other times when the full-time doctors aren't there.

CardioSolution now partners with 11 hospitals across the country, including three in Ohio and others in Kentucky, Washington, Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. Expansion plans include hiring more cardiologists as the company partners with more hospitals in Ohio and Kentucky as well as

in West Virginia, California, Arkansas and New Mexico.

"We'll probably need at least 20 to 25 physicians in addition to what we have right now," Vanderwoude said. "I think we've just identified a very real need. There are many hospitals in smaller markets that have a tremendous struggle trying to recruit enough physicians to provide coverage."

"If you're a hospital and you're serving a meaningful population but that is X miles from a major market with top-notch hospitals, you want to be able to offer the 24/7 cardiology coverage," he said. "But you can't just hire a physician. You need many. And that is daunting for these hospitals."

Despite being based Ohio, CardioSolution wasn't able to partner with hospitals in the Buckeye State until last year. In April 2016, the Ohio Department of Health changed its regulations to allow percutaneous coronary interventions to be performed without surgical backup on-site, Vanderwoude said.

Previously, such cath lab procedures were permitted only in hospitals that were able to do open-heart surgery on site just in case something went wrong.

"Studies were done that showed it is completely safe to do cath lab procedures in sites that don't have open-heart surgery backup," Vanderwoude said. "Most of the country has moved to that practice. That opened up this entire business opportunity."

"Smaller hospitals that could not support an open-heart program can now do these cath procedures," Vanderwoude said. "Those are the hospitals we work with. In nearly all cases, they don't have an open-heart program. Ohio made that change last April, and that is the whole reason" the firm is expanding in its home state.

CardioSolution partnered with Wooster Community Hospital in December and then added Northside Medical Center in Youngstown.

"The programs in Wooster and Youngstown are up and running smoothly, and we have a projected start date of May 1 for Wilmington," Vanderwoude said.

A few small upgrades will be needed to some older equipment at Clinton Memorial Hospital, which has an active cath lab, Vanderwoude said.

"They do have designs to build a new cath lab in their hospital, and we will be assisting them on that," he said. "It's in the planning phase, so I don't have firm dates. In addition to the physicians, the other big piece of what we offer hospitals is our expertise."

"Our cardiologists specialize in interventional cardiology," he

said. "They are doing procedures in a cath lab where they can actually treat blockages in the coronary arteries and in some cases in the limbs.

"If you have got a blockage starting to impact your heart, you're having a heart attack," he said. "They take you into the cath lab and hook into a large X-ray machine, see where the blockages are and use inflated tiny balloons and also place stents to treat that blockage so it restores blood flow to the heart or limbs."

CardioSolution was co-founded by Dr. Lou Vadlamani, an interventional cardiologist who is the firm's chief medical officer, and Perrin Peacock, an expert in staffing.

"Dr. Vadlamani was doing this model with a partner, trekking to a remote market in South Dakota from their homes in two different major cities," Vanderwoude said. "Dr. Vadlamani and Perrin Peacock had the idea of turning this into a scalable business.

"We're like any other fast-growing startup," Vanderwoude said. "Growth is wonderful, but growth hurts. So we're adding corporate staff – in the next year I'm going to say four or five – to help manage the growth, and we're adding physicians and cath lab staff."

"A cath lab is typically staffed by the physicians and by specially trained nurses and specially trained technicians," Vanderwoude said. "If you walk into a cath lab, you might see a physician and two nurses and a tech. In a 24/7 program, you have teams of nurses and techs to do the rotations.

"Finding the nurses and techs with cath lab experience is almost as hard as finding the physicians," he said. "We provide those folks as well. The third type of person we supply is the service line director – somebody with a clinical background who expanded into the business end. Their job is to make sure the entire cardiology service line operates smooth and at as high volume as they can achieve."

The majority owner of CardioSolution is Trustaff, which helps employers fill positions for all types of jobs, including nurses. The firms are located together in Blue Ash and privately held Trustaff covers most of the back-office infrastructure and support for CardioSolution. With \$184.5 million in revenue in 2015, Trustaff is one of the fastest-growing firms in Greater Cincinnati, according to Business Courier research.

Why would a heart doctor want to work for CardioSolution rather than work for a hospital directly or run their own practice?

"It's two things," Vanderwoude said. "We offer a unique quality of life that they can't get in a typical independent practice or as an employee at a hospital. The seven-days on, seven-days off schedule we offer gives them the ability to have those free days, which is unique for many of them.

"We have physicians who are in their 30s and 40s and have young families as well as physicians who have college-age kids and physicians who are empty nesters. They all use their

time off in different ways.

"The other thing is making a difference," Vanderwoude said. "When you're in a big market and work for a big hospital, say as one of 20 cardiologists, you can feel a little like a number. But in a small market you're often the only cardiologist there, and the level of appreciation from the hospital and patients is very high. It's a much higher satisfaction level."

Logistics is key to the success of CardioSolution because the doctors it employs aren't required to live in the communities they serve.

"We provide them housing at the location they are supporting and do all their scheduling," Vanderwoude said. "They know where they're supposed to be and what their travel plans are.

"Travel is a challenge," Vanderwoude said. "We overcome it by as much planning as possible. There's no way around the disruption that can come with travel. In some cases, you've got a decent drive and then a flight for our physicians. In other cases, there's a commercial airport nearby but you have a connecting flight to deal with.

"We have gotten very good at the process to make sure it's as easy for the physician as possible," he said. "That's how we make this work. We do all their travel."