**Our Journey to Accreditation**

To help hospitals optimize their performance while providing patients with optimal care, The American Heart Association has developed Cardiovascular Center of Excellence. AHA recently awarded the first Cardiovascular Center of Excellence (CVCOE) accreditation to my hospital, the Commonwealth Health Regional Hospital of Scranton. As the program director of the Heart and Vascular Institute at Regional Hospital of Scranton, I worked with our team to navigate the accreditation process and earn this important distinction. For hospitals considering Cardiovascular Center of Excellence, these are some of the key learnings to help guide you toward your goal of accreditation.

**Preparing for Accreditation**

Commonwealth Health Regional Hospital of Scranton made the administrative decision to pursue CVCOE because it strategically fits our mission. Beyond the strategic alignment, AHA is a trusted organization that we know both our physicians and community relate to.

To begin the process, we reviewed the CVCOE tool to make sure we met the accreditation criteria and to begin addressing any gaps. We worked to engage the cardiologists, directors, and staff. Next, we worked with the reviewer to understand the overall terminology that the CVCOE is based on. This is a key to success with CVCOE accreditation. We focused on understanding the meaning of CVCOE System of Care and defined our own hospital’s unique system of care using a Hub and Spoke model to clearly identify how we meet the needs of the Cardiovascular patient.

**Navigating the Accreditation Process**

As we began working on our desk review and preparing for our on-site review, we identified the various elements of our overall System of Care—the subsystems within our larger system—and focused on optimizing coordination within each component and throughout the system as a whole.

**System of Care: Formation of CVCOE Heart & Vascular Institute Cardiovascular Quality Committee**

One of the key components to improving coordination of care under Cardiovascular Center of Excellence accreditation was the formation of our overarching CVCOE Cardiovascular Quality Committee. The Committee focuses on reported quality data from multiple data registries including NCDR, ACC’s Accreditation Conformance Database, STS data, Get With The Guidelines and other internal measuring quality metrics to assess and benchmark performance. The Committee analyzes data, develops and institutes action plans, and coordinates internal education to all cardiovascular service lines.

**System of Care: Engaged Physicians**

Another important building block on our journey was a focus on physician engagement. We have a strong employed cardiology practice, as well as close relationships with independent cardiology groups and high levels of engagement with cardiothoracic surgeons. Building and nurturing this engagement was a contributing factor to our success with accreditation.

**System of Care: EMS**

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) also plays a critical role in our larger Cardiovascular System of Care as part of our Center of Excellence. Our pre-
hospital care CHEMS coordinator plays an instrumental role with EMS and the sharing of pre-hospital data. We also focused on building educational opportunities and overall relationship building with our EMS partners. Part of this effort included an ED EMS information/education room for all EMS providers and EMS recognition week celebrations.

**System of Care: Community Referring Hospitals**
Our hospital has a network of five referring hospitals. As part of our CVCOE journey, we focused on ensuring smooth coordination within the referring/receiving relationship and closing any gaps and addressing barriers to successfully integrating the care we provide to patients that are transferred to our facility.

**System of Care: Community Outreach**
The final system CVCOE addresses is the community and the health of the population we serve. Regional Hospital is very much present in the community, providing numerous health screening events and fairs available to the public for cardiovascular education. We host monthly Heart & Vascular Institute Physician Educational Community sessions. We also participate in American Heart Association local community events, providing education and screenings to community members.

**Supporters of the Journey: Keys to Success**
Pursuing Cardiovascular Center of Excellence accreditation was an effort that spanned our hospital and beyond. Each of the following individuals or groups played a critical role in contributing to our achievement:

- CEO and Executive Leadership Team
- Corporate Leadership
- Heart and Vascular Institute Leadership
- Cornerstone Medical Leaders
- EMS
- Referring Hospitals
- Quality Data Abstractors
- The Community

**The Value of Accreditation**
Becoming a Cardiovascular Center of Excellence has been a valuable and positive experience for our hospital. It has expanded role of our Heart and Vascular quality meetings with our quality data and action plans with all Cardiovascular services which enhances our communication of the patients’ care. Accreditation has helped us to identify opportunities for cardiovascular education for all staff to improve coordination across all service lines. Accreditation has guided us as we continue to enhance our communication to our referring hospitals on all Cardiovascular transferred patients. Finally, becoming a Cardiovascular Center of Excellence has provided an opportunity to market our achievement to the communities, especially through our Heart & Vascular Institute educational monthly series where we have the opportunity to explain what this distinction means for the community we serve.

CVCOE is a capstone accreditation that ties all the service lines together. A facility may have individual accreditations, but does that make it a Center of Excellence? The level of engagement among our staff has grown and pursuing the accreditation has helped to nurture a more collaborative culture at our organization. CVCOE accreditation reinforces your organization's mission about the care of cardiovascular patients. This accreditation allows you to provide more targeted approach to care for all your cardiovascular patients.

*Elaine Walker, RN, MSN is Heart and Vascular Institute Program Director at Regional Hospital of Scranton, a division of Commonwealth Health in Scranton, Pennsylvania.*