

Making the Most of Your Career in Cardiovascular Services

By James Burns

Greetings Cardiac and Vascular professional, and welcome to the first of a new monthly installment in *Cath Lab Digest* entitled, **YOUR PATH TO SUCCESS: Career Advice from The Heart & Vascular Experts!** Corazon is a national leader in consulting and recruitment services for the creation of outstanding cardiovascular programs, and throughout the coming months, we will cull our vast expertise in this specialty to present useful and vital information that can help you make the most of your profession. While you have been enjoying your summer, we here at Corazon have been working hard to put together a schedule of articles that we believe you'll find interesting, informative, and valuable to your everyday clinical practice and the advancement of your career.

Cardiovascular is still a booming industry, and the future looks bright for many years to come. In fact, despite reimbursement challenges and increasing competition, a cardiac and vascular program can contribute 20-40% of a hospital's revenue, which is why we believe that **this specialty is an area where effective leadership can bring the most dramatic results.**

We've also been witness to a paradigm shift. With increasing numbers of advanced-service programs opening in communities across the country, the demand for qualified clinical, administrative, and physician leaders to oversee these programs has risen as well.

But, for the last several years, hospitals nationwide have struggled to find qualified leaders within cardiovascular services who possess the right skill set – a mix of clinical knowledge, business savvy, and operational expertise. Capable department leaders no doubt need the ability to direct and understand clinical operations and engage team commitment, while driving the overarching strategy, financial management, and other “big picture” activities.

Do you have the skills and knowledge needed to advance your career? Are you prepared to take an active role in your professional development?

Hopefully, our advice and insight will help you answer a resounding YES to these questions!

Very recently a relative asked for my advice as she begins her first year of training as a Radiology Technologist. I told her very simply that she will never be bored or without career options with a focus on Interventional Cardiology and the Vascular Lab. Indeed, cardiac and vascular services represent a huge portion of a hospital's bottom line. And, although we have made great strides in the treatment of atherosclerotic disease, there is still no cure. So, while there may be momentary changes in procedure volumes or shifts in volume from one area to another, there will always be patients to care for and disease to treat.

I intentionally did not use the term “Cath Lab” above, as many progressive programs are quickly realizing that the marriage of vascular and cardiology services is vital to promote program efficiency and growth. In fact, our physician colleagues could learn a great deal from observing the seamless integration of cardiac and vascular technical staffs in these facilities. We are truly at a crossroads in terms of vascular care, as a new generation of medical professionals is recognizing that the

vascular system can benefit from many of the modalities that have been used for the heart for years. Patients that may have been limited or completely incapacitated by decreased blood flow to their lower extremities have seen dramatic improvement with vascular angioplasty and stenting. Look for more on the dramatic growth in vascular services in a future edition of this column.

As recruitment specialists, we often are asked to comment on what skills professionals should obtain to advance their career. My answer is always the same; learn as much as you can about the business side of our industry. One of the greatest weaknesses in healthcare, according to a top financial and accounting firm, is the lack of formal education and knowledge of healthcare finance within the ranks of clinical managers. Corazon believes this is 100% correct. Nursing, technical, and even medical schools focus hours and hours of curriculum on body systems and treatment modalities without ever considering the financial aspect of a clinical specialty, including how hospitals and healthcare facilities pay the bills!

With the dramatic increases in the types and volumes of interventional procedures, as well as changes in the treatment of acute cardiac conditions that has resulted in a trend of round-the-clock access to care, there will always be a high demand for professionals to “man the labs”. But for those who want to move up a rung on the career ladder, learning ‘the business of healthcare’, including finance, is essential. We will devote an entire column to this topic in a future edition, with ideas for how to improve your marketable skill sets.

Another frequently asked question is: what will CT Angiography mean to my future? The answer, again, is very simple: a great deal. But this impact is not what most people think. Corazon, and our partners in CTA research, believe that any decreases in diagnostic volumes will be more than offset by increases in interventional procedures. Certainly, despite improving technology and access, there is still a lot of missed cardiac and vascular disease. CT and other imaging modalities can lead to earlier and more accurate diagnoses, while being less invasive than traditional angiography. The bottom line? CTA is a great diagnostic tool, but not one that provides treatment, so the interventional suite is not going away anytime soon.

But, as the number of advanced-service cardiac and vascular programs grows and more organizations make major investments into this vital clinical service, there is greater market demand for those qualified for key positions in the Cath (Vascular) Lab, Operating Room, and patient care units. With the right skills and background, clinical professionals can set the stage to advance to leadership roles, and it is our hope that this column is able to help you along your path to success...



Jim is a Vice President at Corazon, a national leader in specialized consulting services for cardiovascular program development from strategic business planning through clinical implementation. Corazon combines business planning, market and financial analysis, feasibility studies, clinical operations, Heart Hospital design, best practice benchmarking, and staff education for newly established or existing programs. Corazon is a 2003 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Company. Call 412-364-8200 or visit www.corazoninc.com.