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The Future of Cardiovascular Care

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In today's economy, heart care is a multibillion dollar business with no end in sight. With the aging of the population and baby boomers becoming cardiac consumers, the demand for cardiovascular services will continue to escalate. Some economists predict that the expenditures and utilization for cardiovascular services will double over the next decade.

In the majority of acute care hospitals, admissions for cardiovascular diagnosis and treatment account for 20-40% of total net hospital revenue. Reimbursement for CV cases continues to be favorable in a state of declining profit margins for hospitals. In fact, the reliance on volume and payments derived from cardiovascular programs makes it nearly impossible for a hospital to remain in acute care without a strong cardiovascular service line.

Huge technology advances in cardiovascular medicine bring another dimension to this equation. Less invasive interventional techniques and newly discovered pharmaceuticals have expanded treatment options for the complex and elderly populations. The advent of early detection modalities and community-based programs have improved access for a younger "at risk" population. This dynamic has contributed to an annual 5-10% rise in cardiovascular procedures in the U.S. over the last five years. In a climate of hospital closures, health care executives have recognized this growth trend in cardiovascular services as they seek revenue-producing opportunities.

The last decade has proven that open heart surgery can be performed safely in a community-based hospital setting. Consumers are more likely to find sophisticated cardiovascular care just minutes from home. Expanded access, new non-invasive testing modalities, and greater medical comfort with interventional treatments have set the stage for comprehensive Heart Centers. The trademark of high performance programs will be to outpace the competitive forces with higher quality and lower costs derived through innovative work efficiencies and throughput.

Balancing clinical excellence with spiraling costs will be a growing challenge to health care leaders. The need for specialty knowledge, combined with astute business planning and management skills, will become even more critical to survival in the cardiovascular arena. Although handsome profits are still possible, margins will continue to shrink without dedicated management expertise. Service line management affords the management focus and market responsiveness required for clinical and financial success in cardiovascular programs. With the market shortage of qualified personnel, outsourcing cardiovascular

management talent may become the preferred option for some providers.

Intelligent and forward thinking facility design will place work efficiency and easy access as high priorities. Dedicated Heart Centers that offer a full scope of service with "one-stop shopping" for physicians, patients, and professional staff will offer a huge competitive advantage tomorrow for those providers willing to make the capital investment today.

Preventions and coronary disease reversal programs will gain more attention and funding as research and experience demonstrate the value of early detection and lifestyle management to both insurance companies and a more educated consumer. Health care providers that consider prevention alongside diagnosis and treatment will benefit from a broader market appeal and earlier referral into their cardiovascular system of care.

Technology will continue to forge ahead. Short-acting anesthetics, life-sustaining devices, and robotic surgery will improve outcomes and lower treatment risks. Advances in genetic therapy, vaccines, and transplantation discoveries are likely to blur the boundaries even more. Although heart disease remains the number one killer of Americans today, it could be as easily prevented as polio over the next century.

In planning for the future, cardiovascular providers are well advised to design and manage for continued change and to rely on the business basics of customer service, diligent management, and market responsiveness. Strategic partnerships between hospitals, physicians, and suppliers will be paramount to competing successfully. Organizations need to be equipped with business knowledge, dedicated leadership, and a team of clinical experts to confidently master the challenges that are certain to bring more excitement and promise to cardiovascular care in the years ahead.



Jackie Johnson is the President and Founder of Corazon Consulting, LP, 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 cardiovascular programs.

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