

Cardiac Care Closer to Home Saves Lives

TAHLEQUAH, Oklahoma – When patients suffer from a cardiac episode, such as a heart attack, seconds matter. The faster the patient receives treatment, the less damage that occurs to the heart muscle. This increases the likelihood of a positive outcome for the patient. Northeast Oklahoma Heart Center (NOHC) in Tahlequah offers experienced physicians and the latest equipment and techniques, close to home, for when those precious seconds matter.

Nearly 16 years ago, Dr. George S. Cohlma, cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon, partnered with Northeastern Health System and Cherokee Nation Health Services to treat some of the more problematic diseases facing the residents of Cherokee County.

“Northeast Oklahoma and Cherokee County have some of the highest rates of diabetes, renal disease, and hypertension in the country,” said Cohlma. “It is extremely important we have extensive, top-flight, cardiovascular healthcare in the local area to try to make a difference in this statistic.”

NOHC began with the intention of bringing the latest technology and services to rural areas in Green Country. Nearly 16 years since its incorporation, the center has made a tremendous impact on the area’s cardiovascular and diabetic issues. They have accomplished this with the care and compassion that can only be found in rural communities where providers are treating their neighbors and friends.

“Before I started the heart center, I was serving as the Chief of the Cardiovascular Surgery department for a major health system in a larger city. I saw a gradual deterioration of how the patients received care,” said Cohlma. “When we opened Northeast Oklahoma Heart Center, I vowed that we would take care of patients the way we would take care of our family. It is that creed and that mentality that sets this heart center apart from all others. I also have to say,

the quality of our care is at the highest level of any comparable heart center in the state or country.”

When David Bergman, 65, of Muskogee, Oklahoma, experienced a heart attack, he chose NOHC for his cardiology care.

“I could have gone to Tulsa,” said Bergmann, “but, I wanted the personal care offered at the smaller rural hospital, close to home. When choosing my aftercare, the choice was easy. NOHC in Tahlequah offers all of the latest treatment methods, but with a more personalized approach.”

The intimacy of the small-town atmosphere, mixed with the latest medical advancements in cardiology care, are what drew Jack Casas, M.D., to the heart center. Casas has practiced in interventional and peripheral vascular disease for more than 30 years.

“NOHC is small enough to know your colleagues and patients on a first-name basis, but large enough to offer top-level, quality care, comparable to centers much larger,” said Casas.

Stephen C. Dobratz, MD, FACC, agrees with Casas, and was also drawn to the center by its ability to offer a more personalized approach to high-quality cardiology care. Dobratz brings more than 25 years of interventional cardiology care to the heart center team.

“I enjoy the personalized heart care we are able to offer in a small community setting,” said Dobratz, “while still offering a full range of cardiology care, including for peripheral artery disease.”

Keeping up with the ever-changing advancements in healthcare is of the highest priority at NOHC.

“There are some new and exciting things we are doing at the heart center,” said Cohlmi, “including some advances in healthcare products that no one else in the area has to treat failing

hearts, interventions in thrombosis, or clots in veins, as well as leadless pacemakers and many new techniques and technology to treat vascular disease.”

Supporting the center’s excellence in cardiology care are a host of healthcare professionals and institutions who play a pivotal role in patient care. Each person who touches the patient, from the first responders, to the Cath lab, to the after-care providers, do so with the compassion they would offer to their own family members.

“I am extremely proud of both the interventional cardiac care in the Cath lab and in the operating room, as our quality outcomes are some of the best in the region, even as we take care of some of the sickest patients in the region,” said Cohlma. “I am also extremely excited and pleased with our treatment of peripheral vascular arterial disease, which also presents at an extremely high rate in northeast Oklahoma. We have more experience, and all of the latest treatments of any major vascular center in the Midwest region.”

The Northeast Oklahoma Heart Center is made possible by Cherokee Health Partners, a collaboration between Northeastern Health System and Cherokee Nation Health Services. The Heart Center is located on the Northeastern Health Center Campus in Tahlequah. To learn more, visit www.neokheartcenter.com or call (918) 229-1431.

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