

Access   Physicians

TELECARDIOLOGY IN ACTION

KEEPING PATIENTS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES
AND SAVING LIVES





TELECARDIOLOGY IN ACTION:

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Cardiology is an in-demand specialty

With an aging U.S. population experiencing increased chronic disease burden from diabetes to high blood pressure, the demand for cardiologists is growing. For hospitals in rural communities, demand already exceeds supply. Only an estimated 10 percent of cardiologists practice in rural areas.

For one rural hospital in Texas, this imbalance presented a major problem for its patients...
and a significant opportunity.

Cuero Regional Hospital Brings World Class Cardiologists to Its Community Through Telemedicine

Located in Cuero, Texas, a rural community of 7,000 residents located about 100 miles from San Antonio,



Cuero Regional serves the citizens of Cuero, Goliad,

Kenedy, Nixon, Westhoff, Yoakum, Yorktown and all rural communities in between.

Cuero Regional spent more than two

years trying to recruit a cardiologist to live and work in Cuero. The hospital needed a cardiologist to provide consultation for its admitted inpatients. With no local cardiologists, the only option was for the hospital to transfer inpatients away to remote hospitals for cardiac care. This interruption in care not only meant lost patients and revenue for the hospital but, more importantly, disjointed and fragmented care for the patient.

“As a community hospital, we have to reduce the burdens associated with transfers and travel for our patient population,” said Lynn Falcone, CEO, Cuero Regional.

According to Falcone, 85 percent of the hospitals' patients have Medicare or Medicaid coverage. These demographics mean that lack of transportation and hesitation about travel to remote locations are very real barriers to care. If patients couldn't or wouldn't be transferred, they would go without care. **"Our patients deserved better,"** said Falcone.

Ultimately unsuccessful at recruiting a permanent cardiologist, Falcone turned to Access Physicians for a modern solution to the longstanding problem. Together, the hospital and the telemedicine physician group built a telecardiology service line to cover the inpatient cardiac care volume.

"To be responsive to the health care needs of our patients and community, Cuero Regional needed to be able to offer on-site cardiology, but recruitment challenges and physician shortages made that impossible," said Falcone.

"With Access Physicians, we now have a state-of-the-art telemedicine cardiology program that allows our patients to get care locally, close to family and friends, and have their cardiac care needs met."

Lynn Falcone, CEO, Cuero Regional

Early in 2020, Access Physicians and Cuero Regional Hospital celebrated one year of successful partnership bringing highly qualified, dedicated cardiologists to residents of Cuero and neighboring towns through the power of telemedicine.

Through the partnership, Cuero Regional connects with an Access Physician, board-certified cardiologist via secure, high-resolution technology in minutes. Four dedicated telecardiologists are assigned to the hospital. On-site nurses and health care providers and other physicians have access to the highest level of consultation on-demand to diagnose, treat and manage patients with congestive heart failure, arrhythmias and other heart-related conditions.



The Access Physicians telecardiologist conducts patient history and discusses symptoms.

"There's no reason that someone's zip code should determine their access to the best clinical resources," said Chris Gallagher, MD, FACC, CEO, Access Physicians.

“Cuero residents rely on Cuero Regional to be there for them, no matter their health care need or challenge. With our partnership, Cuero Regional is keeping keep that promise.”

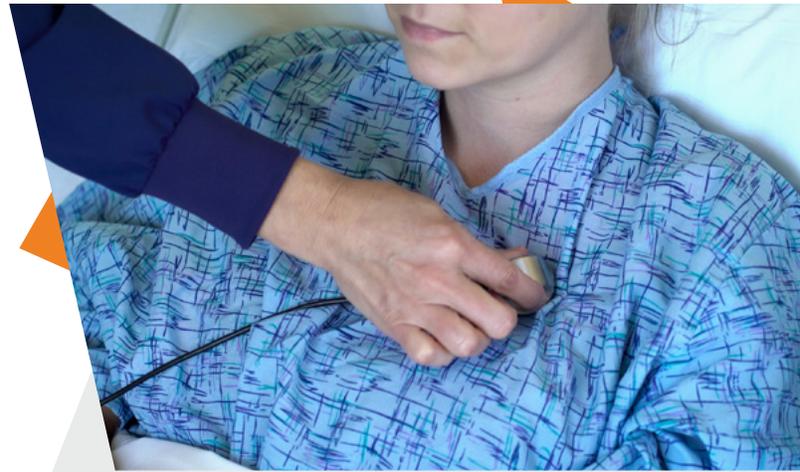
In just one year of the partnership, well over 100 patients have been able to get essential heart care close to home, eliminating the need to be transferred to distant hospitals away from family and local, known and trusted care providers, for care.

Local residents stay close to home, family, friends, and support services, and care is better managed and coordinated. Cuero Regional’s surgeon also relies on Access Physicians to handle pre-operative heart evaluations. Because the evaluations are done locally via telemedicine, the surgeon receives the evaluations much more quickly than if patients had to travel to cardiologists in Victoria or San Antonio. Evaluations are completed and delivered to the surgeon within several days rather than the usual 30 or more days.

The result: **patients get needed care much more quickly.**

Achieving Patient Delight Through Education and Compassionate Bedside Manner

Patients are thrilled with the telecardiology service, with one expressing her delight in having the telecardiologist’s undivided attention throughout the encounter. The telemedicine consult is focused, one-on-one quality time with the physician.



With the digital stethoscope, the telcardiologist hears heart and lung sounds.

All of Access Physicians’ doctors are trained in the art and science of delivering care virtually. In addition, only physicians who demonstrate a high level of empathy and emotional intelligence are hired.

“We prioritize fit for who we hire because we know how important it is for the physician to break through the screen that physically separates him or her from the patient,” said Gallagher.

“Breaking through means having eye contact, connecting with the patient personally and engaging in dialogue.” For the Cuero CEO, this ability to connect with patients was immediately evident.

“The Access Physicians cardiologists have a great rapport with our patients and nurses,” said Falcone. “They are approachable and open. They make everyone feel comfortable.”

Part of Access Physicians’ holistic approach to telemedicine is community education before implementation. That community includes local residents as well as on-site physicians and nurses. Access Physicians’ cardiology service line chief led the community education at Cuero. Meeting with a group of elderly residents virtually through the telemedicine platform, demonstrating the technology, including listening to residents’ hearts with the digital stethoscope and addressing concerns.

Through multiple on-site meetings with nurses and physicians, Cuero’s clinical professionals had the opportunity to ask questions of the Access Physicians team, meet the cardiologists, and try out the technology.

“Buy-in from nurses and physicians is a key factor in the success and efficacy of any telemedicine service we deploy. At Access Physicians, we prioritize getting this buy-in early in the process because we know that acceptance and embrace by on-site staff is essential for patient satisfaction and good clinical outcomes.”

Chris Gallagher, MD, CEO, Access Physicians

The Access Physicians model also prioritizes continuity and familiarity. There are four Access Physicians cardiologists dedicated to Cuero Regional. Patients know they will see a familiar face when they need cardiac care.

These dedicated cardiologists also build strong, collaborative, team-based relationships with the hospital’s nurses and physicians. There is a level of trust with the Access Physicians cardiologists – trust that they will be responsive in every sense of the word.



The Access Physicians cart is easy to use and maneuver.

Nurses know that they will respond to a request for consultation within an hour and respond to requests for information, guidance and advice with respect and professionalism. As a result, the Access Physicians partnership has “raised our standard of care as nurses,” said Jennifer Janssen, RN, BSN, ICU/PACU/Day Surgery Director, Cuero Regional.

The other component of buy-in is maintaining support from the on-site clinicians. One of the ways Access Physicians maintains a good professional working relationship with on-site clinicians is by documenting clinical encounter data in the hospital’s EHR directly. “Our physicians and nurses are extremely impressed with the level of detail and the comprehensiveness of the reports provided by the Access Physicians telecardiologists,” said Falcone.

“Our philosophy is *‘if it’s not in your EMR, it didn’t happen,’*” said Gallagher.

“Working in each hospital’s EMR in real-time ensures that all clinical documentation is up to date, and orders are entered into the patient record. And there’s no need for complicated data integration with yet another third-party software.”

Technology Built by Physicians for Clinicians

Reliable technology is the third piece of the Access Physicians equation. Designed

and built by physicians for health care professionals, the Access Physicians technology prioritizes ease of use, high reliability, immediate resolution of any maintenance issues and second-to-none uptimes.

“We have had zero problems with the technology,” said Falcone.



The Access Physicians telecardiologist has a clear view of the patient.

From the cart to the camera, everything is designed for the patient to have the best physician-patient interaction possible.

And because Access Physicians knows that there is zero room for down time, its US-based health IT professionals are accountable to clinicians and trained specifically for telemedicine support. They answer technical assistance calls with a clinical sense of urgency because minutes matter, and failures to remain calm, communicate clearly and follow protocol jeopardize patient outcomes. Current resolution time of requests for inbound technical support is less than 3 minutes.

The partnership with Cuero Regional is just one example of how Access Physicians works with hospitals to identify needs, build relationships, understand the community, and, ultimately provide compassionate, high-touch health care of the highest caliber through the most advanced, yet simple to use, technology available.

“With Access Physicians, we got the complete package. The technology, the world class specialists, the support and the engagement.”

Lynn Falcone, CEO, Cuero Regional

About Access Physicians

Endorsed by both TMSI, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals, and the Texas Hospital Association, Access Physicians delivers clinical excellence through telemedicine -- building and sustaining unique custom telemedicine programs that work for hospitals, patients, physicians and nurses.

Access Physicians is a multispecialty physician group that combines clinical workflows, peer-referenced specialists, and a world-class telemedicine experience supported with a clinical sense of urgency. Current clients include Fortune 500 healthcare enterprises, independent rural and community hospitals, regional hospital networks, and the nation's first and largest operator of micro-hospitals.

More information is available at [accessphysicians.com](https://www.accessphysicians.com)



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