

M.D. NEWS

Special Medical Feature

Cardiac Care at Compass Medical, P.C. Local Access to Noninvasive Diagnostics, On-Site Vascular Surgeon and Clinical Trials Gives South Shore Cardiac Patients an Advantage in Managing Their Disease

By Kathryn J. Siranosian, M.S.

It's no secret that the practice of primary care medicine is undergoing a transformation. Technological advances, coupled with other changes, like insurance reforms and institutional consolidations and mergers, have created an atmosphere of evolving expectations — for both physicians and their patients.

While many practices in Massachusetts have struggled to keep pace with this “revolution” in primary care, Compass Medical, P.C., a network of eight clinical practice sites throughout southeastern Massachusetts, consistently manages to stay ahead of the curve.

Founded some 14 years ago, Compass Medical, P.C., has matured into a regional leader in primary care medicine. With a staff of 40 health care providers and more than 250 employees overall, the group provides comprehensive primary and preventative health care as well as a variety of associated ancillary services, including a full-service laboratory, X-ray, CT scans, ultrasound, mammography, stress testing and 24-hour monitoring.

PRIMARY CARE WITH ON-SITE CARDIOVASCULAR SERVICES

In addition to its core primary care services, Compass Medical, P.C., also provides many on-site specialists, including noninvasive cardiologist Jonathan Ellis, M.D., and vascular surgeon Edward Kwasnik, M.D., from the Brigham and Women's Surgical Associates at South Shore Hospital.

A native — and current resident — of Milton, Dr. Ellis describes himself as a “local guy.” He earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Massachusetts, in Boston, and then went on to receive a master's in public health from Boston University.

Next, Dr. Ellis attended medical school at the University of Massachusetts, in Worcester, after which he completed



Jonathan Ellis, M.D., Compass Medical, P.C., noninvasive cardiologist in his clinical lab at Compass Medical, P.C., Whitman.

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an internal medicine residency at Mt. Auburn Hospital and a cardiology fellowship at Lahey Clinic, in Burlington.

Dr. Ellis joined Compass Medical, P.C., in 1995, and for several years, he practiced both as an internist and a cardiologist. Recently, however, Dr. Ellis decided to focus exclusively on cardiac patients, as the group works to develop a program of comprehensive cardiovascular services for its patients.

“Compass is primarily a primary care practice, with internists, family practitioners, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and a few specialists all working together,” Dr. Ellis says. “As a network of sites, we take care of a large number of patients from throughout southeastern Massachusetts, and now we’re able to bring them community access to a wide range of cardiovascular services.”

Patients who have concerns about their cardiac health see Dr. Ellis at the Compass Medical, P.C., facility in Whitman, where there’s easy on-site access to a variety of noninvasive cardiac diagnostics, like nuclear stress testing and echocardiography. In addition, the Whitman location is home to a number of specialty and ancillary services, including a lab, X-ray, ultrasound, mammography, vascular surgery physician consults and CT.

“Patients can come to one location and have multiple, different tests done,” Dr. Ellis says. “That really makes it easier.”

Combine the convenience of these centralized diagnostics with Compass Medical’s pioneering efforts in the use of sophisticated, secure electronic medical records, and the result is a network that’s remarkably user-friendly — not only for patients, but for physicians as well.

“I love it because I can easily communicate with referring

doctors,” Dr. Ellis explains. “After doing a stress test, I can send a quick e-mail immediately to the ordering physician. Then, they can get the full formal result electronically later that day, or the next day.”

After their initial diagnostic examination, some patients will require further evaluation and treatment in a hospital setting. “If someone needs an invasive cardiac test or some other kind of intervention, we discuss all the options with the patient and the family,” Dr. Ellis says. “Patients have options here. Some prefer a community hospital, like South Shore Hospital, Brockton or Caritas Good Samaritan, while others want to go into Boston, where we work with the Brigham and Women’s Hospital. We make sure we work out a solution that best meets their needs.”

In general, open, thoughtful discussions like these are tremendously beneficial to cardiovascular patients, explains Deirdre Kelly, R.N., who has worked as Nurse Manager for Compass Medical, P.C., cardiovascular services since 1999.

“Patients who come in with cardiology issues many times are anxious. They don’t know what we’re going to find,” she says. “But, we try to keep it light, and we work hard to make them comfortable. We do a lot of teaching. We tell our patients that we’re going to give them enough information so that they will fully understand what is going to happen. Then, if someone does need an intervention at a hospital, we try to make all the arrangements as smooth as possible for the patient. The fewer problems there are, the less anxious the patient is. It just makes sense all round, and it gives patients a sense of comfort.”

LOCAL ACCESS TO RESEARCH TRIALS

Clearly, cardiac patients benefit from the convenience and accessibility of community-based diagnostics and disease management. However, Compass Medical, P.C., doesn’t stop there. In addition to these fundamental services, the network’s cardiovascular program also offers residents of southeastern Massachusetts uncomplicated community access to world-class clinical research trials.

Through their affiliation with Partners Community Healthcare, Inc. (PHCI), Compass Medical, P.C., participates in the Partners Research and Education Program (PREP). PREP was founded in the late 1990s as a way for clinical researchers at Partners Healthcare to reach out to patients from throughout Massachusetts.



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Deirdre Kelly, R.N., Nurse Manager of the Compass Medical, P.C. cardiovascular program and clinical research trials, checks the blood pressure of patient and clinical trials participant Mary Delsette of Brockton.

“Most research is done in the academic setting, but this was an initiative to get research out into the community,” explains Ms. Kelly, who also serves as Nurse Manager for clinical trials at Compass Medical, P.C. “This allows patients to become involved in some of these world-class trials without having the burden of driving all the way to Boston.”

Compass Medical, P.C., is one of only a handful of PREP sites scattered throughout the state. Of course, as with any clinical trial, participants must meet strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. Interestingly, though, participation in these clinical trials is not limited only to Compass Medical’s patients. Patients from other practices may participate, as well.

“It’s really all about giving people community access to these trials,” Ms. Kelly says. The trials are administered and monitored exclusively out of Compass Medical’s Whitman facility, but enrollment is generally an open process, she adds.

Typically, the Compass Medical, P.C., cardiovascular program is engaged in seven or eight different PREP clinical trials at any one time. These studies are focused on cardiovascular disease and represent a wide spectrum of today’s most advanced clinical research in the field.

For instance, one current trial is examining how cholesterol

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Compass Medical, P.C.

levels affect outcomes for patients who have been hospitalized with acute coronary syndrome, such as a heart attack or unstable angina. Another study is monitoring anemia in diabetic patients with chronic renal insufficiency. A third trial involves patients who have atrial fibrillation and is designed to compare a study medication with another drug that is already FDA-approved.

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Jonathan Ellis, M.D., and Brenda Casper, R.N., of the Compass Medical, P.C., cardiovascular program, work with patient Mary Delsette of Brockton to complete a stress test in the Compass Medical, P.C., Whitman laboratory.

PHOTO BY DEBRA TROYANGS

explains Dr. Ellis. “To have this type of clinical trial offered in the community setting was unheard of 10 years ago. But through PREP, we can offer patients in the community the option of becoming involved in these important clinical trials.”

PREP research studies are important because they change the way medicine is practiced, he continues. A few years ago, Dr. Ellis recalls, Compass Medical, P.C. participated in a study about cholesterol management in patients who had acute coronary syndrome. The results suggested that patients who aggressively lowered their cholesterol had a better outcome.

“Now, that is the standard of care,” Dr. Ellis says. “These trials have a great effect on the practice of medicine. Once the data is collected, things move quickly, and this research becomes state-of-the-art treatment.”

Patients who participate in clinical research trials can also benefit in more direct, “real-time” ways, says Ms. Kelly. Because they have to follow a rigorous protocol of office visits and monitoring, these patients have the advantage of an

other layer of care in their disease management. Each trial has its own specific requirements, but most participants need to check in with Dr. Ellis and/or Ms. Kelly once a month, or at least once every three months. Occasionally, certain short-term trials are designed to last only three months, but most studies will follow patients for one to six years.

“Because I see these patients so frequently, I might pick something up a little bit sooner than if they waited for their annual primary care visit,” Ms. Kelly says. “It might not even be

related to the study, but I will send labs to a patient's physician and have them follow up. It's one additional layer of health care that acts as an advocate for the patient."

In addition, Ms. Kelly feels that study participants benefit from becoming actively engaged in their health management.

"Often we'll see improvements in their health," she says.

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— Deirdre Kelly, R.N., Nurse Manager for Clinical Trials, Compass Medical, P.C.

"Research patients tend to be very motivated. There is a lot of teaching involved, which really allows them to increase their knowledge base regarding their disease process."

The success of Compass Medical's cardiovascular initiative, in combination with the growing popularity of the PREP clinical trials, has created an unavoidable predicament — now, the program needs room to expand.

Fortunately, later this year, Compass Medical, P.C., is moving its hub from Whitman to a new facility in East Bridgewater. Dubbed the "Southeast Medical Center," this new building will house 70,000 square feet of medical and clinical office space, allowing the group to offer a multidisciplinary, integrated approach to health care. Primary care physicians, subspecialists, and state-of-the-art diagnostic services will all be on site. The cardiovascular program plans to expand across an entire floor, including seven new exam rooms, two stress-testing labs, and a designated echocardiography room for cardiac and carotid studies.

"In the new facility we'll be able to do more of what we do best," says Dr. Ellis. "It's very gratifying to offer this level of service as a community practice."

For more information about cardiology services offered by Compass Medical, P.C., please call (781) 447-8704 or visit www.compassmedical.net. ■



The Compass Medical, P.C. cardiovascular team, pictured in Whitman, back row (L to R): Deirdre Kelly, R.N., Nurse Manager of the program and clinical research trials; Jonathan Ellis, M.D., noninvasive cardiology leader; Nancy Scott, N.P., nurse practitioner specialist; Joan Dunne, medical assistant; front row (L to R): Claire Brady-Reilly, echocardiographer; Rosa Rodrigues, medical assistant; Kelly Benson, medical assistant; and Brenda Casper, R.N. Missing from the photo are vascular surgeon Edward Kwasnik, M.D.; Patricia Newcomb, cardiology secretary; and Erum Moin, research assistant.

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