

When life is on the line, you want loved ones with you.

St. Rita's new Cardiovascular Intervention Unit is all about bringing patients together with their families and easing the discomfort of outpatient heart procedures.

By John Fike for St. Rita's Medical Center—RitaScope Magazine

When 84-year-old St. Rita's Medical Center patient Florence Elliott had a stent put in a blocked artery last September, only two members of her family at a time could visit in her room because it was so small and crowded. The rest had to wait in the lobby.

All five of Florence's daughters make it a point to be with their mom any time she's in the hospital. And many times her two sons and some of her 26 grandchildren will visit her as well. That made it difficult for Florence to spend much time with any of her loved ones that came to visit her in September.

"We had to take turns," recalls her husband, Lester Elliott.

In February, when Florence had surgery done on a second blocked artery, the story was different. As an outpatient, Florence was able to take advantage of St. Rita's new 16-bed Cardiovascular Interventional Unit that opened December 7. The unit's spacious room fit all her children and her husband comfortably.

"Everything is big and new and bright," Florence said, surrounded by her family. "It's beautiful."

Lester echoed the comment, making particular note that his wife didn't have to share amenities with patients in another room. Instead, they were conveniently included in her private room.

"It's by far nicer," he said.

The Cardiovascular Intervention Unit and the Chest Pain Center are now part of The Heart Center of St. Rita's, on the hospital's second floor. The new unit is designed for observation of outpatients undergoing cardiovascular catheterization and diagnostic procedures, including angioplasty and stenting. Patients stay less than 48 hours, and usually less than 24 hours. The unit also facilitates recovery

procedures for all patients of cardiovascular surgery, and provides follow up care for patients of the Chest Pain Center.

The new unit was designed with ease and comfort in mind for patients and their families. Conveniences like the lobby and coffee kiosk, gift shop and cafeteria are all a short distance away and easy to find. The rooms are bigger, private and decorated to help patients feel more at home.

It's all part of a comprehensive plan to bring all of St. Rita's heart patients together in a single environment equipped to handle their particular needs and provide specialized care. That plan will develop further with completion of the Medical Center of the Future. The project will put all heart-related services together on the second floor.

Joanna Wessell, clinical supervisor for the Cardiovascular Intervention Unit and the neighboring Cardiac Catheterization Lab, said that previous to the new unit heart care outpatients were brought into the same-day surgery center where the medical staff dealt with numerous types of surgeries. Because of the variety of procedures performed through that center, care was not as heart-specialized as that provided by the 13 staff members in the Cardiovascular Intervention Unit are.

"We do the best job because our specialty is cardiac — we do it every day," Wessell said.

One example of that increased care is how the staff gathers and prepares a patient's medical information prior to surgery. Under the old system, the staff that admitted cardiovascular patients were trained in generalized care and may not be aware of the specific information needed for cardiovascular procedures.

“We didn’t have total control of our patients as far as having all the information ahead of time,” Wessell said.

With a staff specially trained in heart procedures, surgeons no longer have to do without that information because nurses are familiar with their needs and prepare the data ahead of time, she said.

Construction on the Cardiovascular Intervention Unit began Dec. 6, 2003, and took exactly a year to complete. The work was done in phases so the hospital could continue to operate without interruption.

A growing clientele hospital-wide was part of the inspiration behind the Cardiovascular Intervention Unit. A shortage of bed space in both the same-day surgery department and the critical care unit was partially relieved by the 16 additional beds in the new unit, Heart Center at St. Rita’s Administrator Mary Reed said.

“Other departments are so full everyday they’re calling us for bed space,” Wessell said. But beds in the Cardiovascular Intervention Unit are reserved only for cardiovascular outpatients and Chest Pain Center patients that require observation. Reed said the hospital anticipates serving 160 cardiovascular outpatients per month through the Cardiovascular Intervention Unit.

Mostly, the Cardiovascular Intervention Unit was created for the convenience of St. Rita’s heart patients and the doctors who serve them. Connected to the catheterization lab and surgery rooms, patients experience very little transition during their stay. They are admitted to their room in the new unit when they come in, return to that room after the surgery and leave from that room when their ready to go. Previously, those same patients may have seen the inside of two or three different rooms for various parts of their stay, besides the surgery room. Additionally, doctors are able to spend more time with their cardiovascular patients because they are centrally located rather than spread throughout the hospital. Doctors save time because they don’t have to go from department to department and floor to floor to find their patients.

“We created a unit that is an extension of the cath lab and the Chest Pain Center to make a comprehensive cardiac unit,” Wessell said. “Patients stay in one place with more specialized

care and more continuity. It’s beneficial for the patients and that’s the bottom line.”

Conveniences like her room’s proximity to the surgery room, the doctor’s ease in locating her, or the staff’s ability to gather her necessary medical history may not come readily to mind for patients like Florence Elliott. But it means she can be relaxed and comfortable during her stay and reduce her anxiety. It means she’s able to spend time with her otherwise busy children and not worry about how many can fit in her room.

Relaxed and confident just moments before her surgery, only one thing troubled the British native: “I’m just thirsty. I want my cup of tea.”