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## Seton grows heart institute

### Rural patients targeted with new offices

Premium content from Austin Business Journal - by Sandra Zaragoza , ABJ Staff

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**Seton Heart Institute has grown rapidly in the last six months. It's added physicians, specialists and outreach offices across Central Texas — investments that have boosted patient activity and set the stage for developing a major cardiology research center.**

Since ramping up, SHI has doubled its volume of cardiology procedures and more than doubled its volume of new patients. SHI is still tracking the exact growth at its various locations, but said that Seton Medical Center's procedural volume has grown 103 percent in the last six months.

Now, it plans to establish four or five more outreach offices in smaller communities in the next year.

Meanwhile, Seton Healthcare Family — which runs 11 local hospitals — is focusing on making the institute a major cardiology research center in Central Texas by leveraging the health care network's affiliation with the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, said Dr. Mark Pirwitz, SHI president and CEO.

As far as patient care, SHI is distinguishing itself regionally with a model centered on delivering care closer to where patients live and receive primary care, Pirwitz said.

"I think we've evolved pretty rapidly in the last eight or nine months," Pirwitz said.

SHI has 14 locations throughout Central Texas, including its expanded headquarters in Medical Park Tower next to Seton Medical Center Austin. SHI's locations include seven outreach offices that offer care primarily in smaller communities, such as Bastrop, Luling and Pflugerville.

These outreach offices are housed in free-standing offices or hospitals, or are located in partnering primary care physicians' offices. Colocating enables SHI to provide heart care in some communities where small patient bases would otherwise make it cost-prohibitive to offer such service.

SHI has also grown through a partnership with Austin Regional Clinic that places its cardiologists in certain ARC locations, making them more readily available resources to ARC physicians and patients.

“We can give the best quality of care that we can when the communication with primary care doctors is better,” Pirwitz said.

Since January, SHI has nearly doubled its number of physicians to 23 cardiologists who offer a full array of cardiovascular services from noninvasive care to treatment for advanced heart failure. SHI added three electrophysiologists: Drs. **Jason Zagrodsky**, **Javier Sanchez** and **Kristopher Heinzman**. They are the first electrophysiologists under SHI’s umbrella. The institute is also hiring two physicians for its heart failure transplant program.

SHI is close to being able to cover Central Texas as it would like, Pirwitz said. One of the bigger challenges to covering so much ground has been establishing the infrastructure, such as office space and electronic medical record systems, Pirwitz said.

Now that staffing has been addressed, SHI is focused on establishing itself as a regional leader in cardiovascular research.

The research program will give patients access to clinical research trials, and will make SHI more attractive to academically focused physicians, said Dr. **Steven Gigliotti**, who joined SHI in April as a cardiologist and co-director of research.

“Being part of a research center tends to attract physicians, nurses and physician extenders that want to be part of an academically rigorous and cutting-edge program,” Gigliotti said.

Heart Hospital of Austin, which is part of St. David’s HealthCare, has a more established cardiovascular research program and is seen by many as a leader in heart-related stem cell research. There are about 70 cardiovascular clinical trials happening right now at the hospital, some are in partnership with academic centers. The hospital has become the largest non-academic cardiovascular research center in the country, said **Mark Clayton**, senior vice president of St. David’s.

“This research has led to improved patient care and improved lives. It’s definitely worth our continued commitment,” Clayton said.

The type of research being done now at SHI is industry-sponsored drug trials, but the institute eventually plans to generate homegrown research, Gigliotti said.

With that goal in mind, it plans to establish a fellowship program for cardiologists, which would be the first of its kind in Central Texas.

The research center has two goals for the next year, Gigliotti said: to continue adding to its number of research projects, and to “make Seton known for its cutting-edge cardiovascular care.”