

# healthcare

# CAREERS

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## Cardiovascular Careers: The heart of healthcare

### Gazette News Service

It's no secret that the field of health care is exploding with new career opportunities and is expected to continue its upward swing. In the area of cardiovascular care, the outlook is especially favorable.

Michigan is fortunate to be home to five nationally ranked cardiovascular care leaders according to Solucient, an information products company serving the health care industry. Solucient maintains the nation's largest health care database, with records from more than 26 million discharges from 2,900 U.S. hospitals. It ranks quality of care for many specialties at hospitals through a proprietary system of a dozen criteria.

Among Solucient's top 100 cardiovascular facilities in the U.S. are Saint Joseph Mercy Health System and the University of Michigan Health System in Ann Arbor, Mercy General Health Partners in Muskegon, Borgess Medical Center in Kalamazoo, and Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids.

Cardiovascular health care encompasses any need specifically related to heart health. This includes everything from specialty physicians, surgeons and nurses to the areas of preventive care education, exercise physiology, nutritional counseling and social work. Dozens of technical positions such as diagnostic imaging (MRI and CT scan), echocardiogram, angioplasty and EKG also offer almost limitless future openings.

Michelle Link, nursing director of Cardiology Services at Bronson Methodist Hospital, 601 John St., sees the diversity in cardiovascular health as a benefit to those wishing to enter the field. "In general, I think the thing that is so enticing about cardiology is there are so many different opportunities," she said. "You can possess a variety of skill sets and still find a spot within cardiovascular services."

You either see the patients frequently and develop a really strong relationship with

"So really it captures a broad array of individuals within cardiology."

Exercise specialists have a wide variety of responsibilities including work with cardiac rehab as well as overseeing stress tests. "They have patient care experience, they have team experience and they're also highly technical," Link said.

Another exciting position, she said, is cardiovascular technologist. "They work in the cath lab and they also work in the post-procedure unit and they're very much hands-on clinicians providing care for the patients," Link noted.

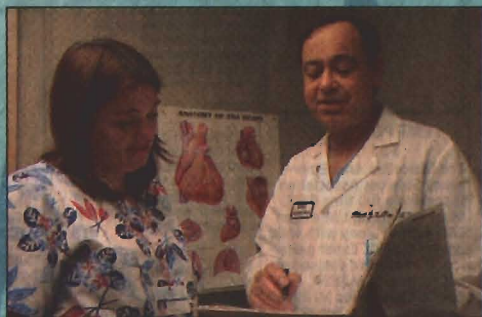
General cardiovascular services techs perform EKGs, start IVs, and take blood pressure. "So they have more specific functions for patient care and they're overseen by the exercise specialists," she said.

"Cardiology is an exciting place to work because there are endless role opportunities," Link said. "This allows people with a broad array of skills to find their niche."

According to Mary Poskie, RN, MSA and director of cardiovascular services for Trinity Health's Saint Joseph Mercy Health System in Ann Arbor, considering a cardiovascular health career calls for a number of interests and abilities. "Heart patients are a fun group. They have faced an event or condition that gives them a unique ability to appreciate life and everyday health. We need

outgoing, highly skilled people who can support them. It's important to work well in a fast-paced environment that can include life and death situations. If you enjoy the areas of overall wellness and education, these are also areas where you'll find opportunities in cardio health."

Following a cardiac event, many heart patients must relearn their daily lifestyles, incorporating specific nutrition and exercise needs as well as a different outlook. Poskie adds, "That's



At the Borgess Cardiology Group office, Tonya Keith asks Dr. Robert LaPenna a question about a patient's record.



At Bronson Methodist Hospital, nursing director of Cardiology Services Michelle Link, left, plugs in leads connected to a patient being tested for stress. Marie Hutchins, center and Michalen Odean prepare to assist with the test.

jobs. Our job is to provide the cardiovascular doctors and surgeons to restore their health, the technicians who help gather the diagnostic facts, and the team who will work with the patient to return them to health and daily living. We are always looking for excellence in both technical abilities and positive attitude to serve our patients."

Dr. Robert LaPenna, cardiologist with Borgess Cardiology Group, 1717 Shaffer St., said that a cardiologist has to have a certain amount of optimism in life. "That's kind of a prerequisite because we face some fairly aggressive challenges," he said. "And I have always felt that an important part of being a cardiologist is being able to convey to the patient and the family, even under the most extreme challenge, that we are excited about making things better."

If things don't go well, and sometimes they don't, if a cardiologist approaches it with a "can-do" attitude, at least the family knows this person has a positive attitude and everything was done that could be done, LaPenna added.

Besides being optimistic a cardiologist has to be fairly adventuresome, at times willing to take some risk, to assume that the potential benefit outweighs the risks, LaPenna said. "So you can't be shy, you can't be awkward, you can't lack self-confidence," he

noted. "These are all very important traits because the stakes are very high." There is no room for error.

People know when they come in with a heart attack or with a heart problem that it's potentially life-threatening and they need to be able to grab on to something, LaPenna said. "A cardiologist is almost like a lifeguard at times for the patient and for the family, so they can get a sense of security," he said. When you sense that they get that feeling and they know they're in good hands, it's extremely gratifying, LaPenna said. "The highs are extremely high and the lows are extremely low in cardiology," he noted. "Fortunately we have predominantly the high part, with only a small percentage of difficult challenges that we can't handle."

With baby boomers reaching the age when coronary artery disease is likely, demand for cardiologists is increasing and the supply is diminishing a little because the training for cardiology is very demanding and time-consuming, LaPenna said. "The demands in training are much greater now than they were when I was in training," he