



Carolinan HealthCare System

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Carolinan HealthCare System's International Medical Outreach Plays Integral Role in Establishing Fully-Equipped Cardiology Program in Belize

The country's only public tertiary care hospital opens echocardiography laboratory, completes capability to provide full range of cardiology services

CHARLOTTE, N.C., Jan. 28, 2014 –Carolinan HealthCare System's [International Medical Outreach \(IMO\) Program](#) and the [Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital](#) (KMH) celebrated the establishment of Belize's first public cardiology program fully-equipped to perform diagnostic and interventional services. The occasion was marked by the opening of a diagnostic echocardiography (echo) laboratory on Jan. 20 at the KMH in Belize City, the country's only public tertiary care hospital.

The cardiology program – supported via equipment donations and personnel training by the IMO Program, a collaboration between [Carolinan HealthCare System](#) and the [Heineman Foundation of Charlotte](#) – has evolved from having no equipment to deliver cardiac services to now offering echocardiographs, cardiac catheterizations and open heart surgeries.

Since the initial donation of a mobile catheterization laboratory in 2011, the KMH has performed more than 130 cardiac catheterizations and 16 heart surgeries, including the [first open heart surgery](#) in the country. The new echo laboratory will allow KMH to more than double the number of patients diagnosed for heart problems each week, reducing patients' wait time for an echo test from months to weeks or days.

"Within three years, our evolving program has resulted in many first time events for the hospital and Belize, due to careful planning, high clinical standards and generous supporters like the IMO Program," said Adrian Coye, chief of cardiothoracic surgery and medical services director at the KMH. "We have opened access to a range of routine services that previously were not accessible to most Belizeans and have advanced heart care at KMH by almost 30 years."

Echo machines are basic tools used to diagnose and help prevent heart problems, yet they are not readily available in Central America. As a result, patients either receive no treatment or must travel to neighboring countries for the same care. By providing the machines and training technicians to operate them, the IMO Program helps public hospitals treat patients in their home countries, at very low or no cost. Since 2012, the Program helped install eight echo laboratories in rural hospitals in Guatemala, El Salvador and Belize, equipped to capture and send heart images to cardiologists nationwide and worldwide for additional consultation.

The IMO Program also coordinates the travel of medical teams from Carolinas HealthCare System's [Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute](#) to the KHMH to train and assist Belizean teams in performing catheterizations and heart surgeries. Sanger staff will continue assisting on a monthly basis until KHMH teams can perform the procedures without support. The open heart surgery program at Sanger is ranked in the top 15 percent in the United States for coronary artery bypass graft and, in January 2014, several Carolinas HealthCare System facilities were named in *Becker's Hospital Review's* list of "[100 Hospitals with Great Heart Programs.](#)"

"The outcomes and services of the cardiology program at the KHMH are a living testimony to the level of professionalism and dedication of its medical staff and leadership," said Francis Robicsek, MD, PhD, vice president of the IMO Program. "For more than 50 years, our international medical outreach efforts have helped enhance the health of patients globally, and the efforts of the staff at the KHMH are truly exceptional."

The fully-equipped cardiology program in Belize is the second one the IMO Program has helped establish in Central America. The first was developed in 1984 in Guatemala City, Guatemala, where it co-founded what remains the most comprehensive public heart institute in the continent, [UNICAR](#) (La Unidad de Cirugía Cardiovascular de Guatemala). The Program has also supported cardiology services in Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Romania and Hungary among other countries.

The IMO program has worked with hospitals abroad to install picture archiving systems (PACS) that allow cardiologists in Central America to conference with cardiologists in the U.S. through a virtual communication portal. The KHMH and UNICAR have received PACS and communicate with cardiologists at Sanger and with other clinical staff at Carolinas HealthCare System.

"Our journey with the IMO Program and the resulting cardiology program is as a success story that has resulted in newfound hope for our patients and has helped us achieve a higher level of quality care at KHMH," said Gary Longsworth, MD, chief executive officer of the KHMH. "The evolution of our cardiac services has been transformational and is a testament of the determination of our hospital to make a difference in the course of medicine in Belize."

About Carolinas HealthCare System

[Carolinas HealthCare System](#) (carolinashealthcare.org), one of the nation's leading and most innovative healthcare organizations, provides a full spectrum of healthcare and wellness programs throughout North and South Carolina. Its diverse network of care locations includes academic medical centers, hospitals, freestanding emergency departments, physician practices, surgical and rehabilitation centers, home health agencies, nursing homes and behavioral health centers, as well as hospice and palliative care services. Carolinas HealthCare System works to enhance the overall health and wellbeing of its communities through high quality patient care, education and research programs, and numerous collaborative partnerships and initiatives.

About The Heineman Foundation of Charlotte

Since its establishment in 1943, the [Heineman Foundation of Charlotte](#) has pursued a variety of local and international research and humanitarian projects focused on providing medical assistance and [education](#). Located on the campus of Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte, N.C., Heineman works closely with Carolinas HealthCare System to provide medical training focused on cardiac care to health providers overseas, as well as medical equipment and supplies to impoverished countries.

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