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History in the making: Four area health systems dedicate new cardiac catheterization lab

NIAGARA FALLS, NY –Western New York healthcare history was made today as officials from Catholic Health, Kaleida Health, Erie County Medical Center and Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center joined area care providers and emergency medical service personnel in dedicating the first and only cardiac catheterization laboratory in Niagara County.

The new facility, at The Heart Center of Niagara on Memorial’s downtown Niagara Falls campus, is the result of an unprecedented community collaboration between the four health systems and will be jointly operated by them.

“First and foremost we are all Western New Yorkers who for years have been concerned about the region’s alarmingly high cardiovascular mortality rates,” said Neil Dashkoff, M.D., medical director of the new lab. After all, it’s the number one killer in Western New York, specifically in Niagara County.”

Dr. Dashkoff noted that when it comes to interventional cardiology services, healthcare disparities have historically been dire in Niagara County especially for African Americans, Native Americans, the economically disadvantaged, people with special needs and people with mental health issues.

“Today we are changing that history, thanks to the willingness of Catholic Health President & CEO Joseph McDonald, Erie County Medical Center President & CEO Thomas Quatroche Jr., Kaleida Health CEO Jody Lomeo and their respective boards of directors to work together with us for the good of the community,” said Joseph A. Ruffolo, President & CEO of Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center. “For that we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.”

Cardiac catheterization is a procedure for diagnosing and treating cardiovascular conditions in which a long thin tube called a catheter is inserted in an artery or vein in a patient’s groin, neck or arm and threaded through the blood vessels to the heart.

The Niagara cardiac catheterization lab, commonly called a cath lab, will host such procedures as cardiac angiography, stent placement and balloon angioplasty and will maintain 24/7/365 capabilities to perform emergency and scheduled elective procedures and interventions.

Ten experienced interventional cardiologists led by Dr. Dashkoff, James Conley, M.D. and Joseph Gelormini, M.D. will be supported by a 10-member clinical team that has undergone

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six months of rigorous training working side by side with the teams at the Catholic Health Heart Center at Mercy Hospital and at Gates Vascular Institute.

"We've been committed to bringing this specialized cardiac care to our patients in the Niagara region and the community at large," said McDonald, whose Catholic Health system operates Mount St. Mary's Hospital in Niagara County. "We are pleased we were able to take a lead role, along with that of our partners, in making this project a reality."

"The Heart Center of Niagara at NFMMC represents the benefit of a true collaborative process between our region's leading healthcare partners, which will ultimately save lives," Quatroche said. "ECMC is proud to have participated in bringing the Heart Center of Niagara to fruition and we are confident the new cardiac cath lab will provide greater patient access to quality care for the residents of Niagara County."

Construction costs for the \$2.2 million, 4,145-square-foot facility were borne by all four partners and supported by \$1.1 million in state funding.

The new Niagara cath lab is projected to serve 925 patients in its first year. That number is expected to increase to 1,100 patients in the second and third years of operation.

It will be supported by a Million Hearts Campaign, a regional effort that will increase awareness about heart disease prevention and empower community members to better control their own heart health.

"Today really is an historic day not just in Niagara County, but across Western New York," said Kaleida's Lomeo. "With four health systems working together on education, prevention, early detection and, of course, the medical interventions that will be performed in this new facility, we know we can overcome healthcare disparities, lower cardiovascular mortality rates and save precious lives."

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