

## Cardiac credentialing organization gives HeartWorks high marks

People who exercise after a heart attack often have serious questions: Will physical activity be too strenuous for my heart? How much exercise is safe?

But one thing that those enrolled in Ohio University's HeartWorks program won't have to worry about is the quality of their cardiac rehabilitation care, thanks to a recent seal of approval bestowed by the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation (AACVPR).



“(AACVPR) certification offers peace of mind to savvy healthcare consumers,” said Bonnie Anderson, an AACVPR director. “Patients and family members can feel confident in the knowledge that the staff has the knowledge and skills necessary to deal with the wide variety of issues that a life-changing cardiac and pulmonary diagnosis can lead to.”

Another plus of certification, Anderson said, is that insurance companies recognize its recipients as meeting high standards in patient care that can ultimately help keep down healthcare costs for patients.

Though the certification is not required, it provides a boost to HeartWorks' reputation, said Kathy Partusch, HeartWorks' cardiac rehabilitation nurse. The certification came after a committee evaluated the facility's standards of care. The AACVPR's peer-reviewed accreditation process assesses a facility's adherence to specified professional standards and guidelines.

HeartWorks is operated by the College of Health Sciences and Professions and the WellWorks fitness and nutrition center, in partnership with O'Bleness Memorial Hospital. The program helps patients at risk for cardiac issues, such as those who have had a heart attack or who have heart disease. The program began in 2001 and has since worked with about 1,000 patients, Partusch said.

“We teach people how to live with heart disease,” Partusch said. “For some people, it's very scary and anxiety-producing. They're worried that whatever they're going to do will cause another heart attack. So this is a chance to build some confidence. And because there are other people here that are like themselves, it's a great support system.”

Participants must have a referral from a physician to get into HeartWorks, and the program works on risk factors that contribute to heart disease. While some factors can't be helped – age, gender, family history – the program focuses on ways that patients can reduce risks, from exercise to good nutrition to building a sense of empowerment, Partusch said.

One of HeartWorks strengths, Partusch said, is its multidisciplinary approach to helping participants. Program participants see Francie, the nutritionist. She does both individual and group counseling for participants. Also work with graduate students in Psychology dept for health psychology, stress management and relaxation. Dr. Jay Shubrook is the program's medical director who determines whether someone is physically able to participate.

HeartWorks also partners with exercise physiology students in Ohio University's School of Applied Health Sciences and Wellness, helping them gain real-world experience. Students spend a year with the program, applying in a clinical setting what they have learned in the classroom.

Programs such as HeartWorks can be particularly important in poverty-prone areas such as Appalachia, Partusch said. Studies have shown that residents in the region have up to a 20 percent higher risk of dying from heart disease than those living in other parts of the country.

“Because of the nature of where we live and the lack of access to health care,” Partusch said, “HeartWorks has been a godsend to many.”

-- Matt Pentz