



St. Mary's achieves accreditation for echocardiology procedures

Contact: Mark Ralston

706.296.6717 mrалston@stmarysathens.org

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Athens, Ga. – St. Mary's Cardiac and Vascular Services Laboratory has achieved accreditation from the Intersocietal Accreditation Commission (IAC) on Echocardiography for procedures that use sound waves to detect and diagnose numerous heart conditions. With this accreditation, St. Mary's becomes one of only a handful of providers in Georgia accredited for adult Transesophageal Echo (TEE) procedures.

"This accreditation is a huge achievement," said echo lead technologist Jennifer Helton. "The standards for quality, training and equipment set by the IAC are very high and the process to earn accreditation is rigorous. I'm extremely proud of our colleagues and medical staff for their dedication to providing our patients with top quality care."

Echocardiography – often known as "echo" – is used to assess the heart and surrounding blood vessels, using painless sound waves and the echoes they create instead of radiation. It can detect heart disease or signs of serious heart conditions. St. Mary's equipment uses 3D Doppler technology that provides vital information about the motion of heart muscle and blood flow. Among the many capabilities of echo are measuring how well heart muscle contracts to pump blood, how well the heart's valves work, and how well blood flows into and out of the heart.



St. Mary's 3D echo technology helps cardiologists diagnose a variety of heart and valve conditions

"There are many factors that contribute to an accurate diagnosis based on echocardiography," the IAC says. "The training and experience of the sonographer performing the procedure, the type of equipment used, and the quality assessment metrics each facility is required to measure all contribute to a positive patient outcome. IAC accreditation is a 'seal of approval' that patients can rely on as an indicator of consistent quality care and a dedication to continuous improvement."

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the American Heart Association, nearly 800,000 Americans die each year from cardiovascular disease, roughly one person every 40 seconds.

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St. Mary's accreditation specifically is for adult transthoracic and transesophageal procedures.

Transthoracic procedures send sound waves and receive their echoes through a handheld transducer that can be moved over the surface of the chest.

Transesophageal procedures also use sound waves and their echoes, but the transducer is positioned inside the esophagus, the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach, under moderate sedation. The advantage of transesophageal procedures is that the esophagus lies close to the heart and there is no interference from the bones of the chest and back. These factors allow for improved diagnostic accuracy with better visualization of the heart valves.

"Echo is an invaluable tool in assessing patients for heart tissue damage, valve disorders and other issues that compromise cardiac function," said Erick Avelar, St. Mary's medical director of advanced cardiac imaging. "I am so proud of our Cardiac and Vascular Services team for achieving continued accreditation in transthoracic echo and our first accreditation for transesophageal echo."

About IAC

The IAC is a nonprofit organization in operation to evaluate and accredit facilities that provide diagnostic imaging and intervention-based procedures, thus improving the quality of patient care provided in private offices, clinics and hospitals where such services are performed. The IAC provides accreditation programs for vascular testing, echocardiography, nuclear/PET, MRI, diagnostic CT, dental CT, carotid stenting, vein treatment and management, cardiac electrophysiology and cardiovascular catheterization. The IAC programs for accreditation are dedicated to ensuring quality patient care and promoting health care and all support one common mission: *Improving health care through accreditation*[®]. Committed to its mission through a rigorous peer review process, the IAC has granted accreditation to more than 14,000 sites since its inception in 1991. To learn more about IAC, visit intersocietal.org.

About St. Mary's

St. Mary's Health Care System, a member of Trinity Health, is a faith-based, not-for-profit health care ministry whose mission is to be a compassionate and transforming healing presence in the communities it serves. St. Mary's puts special focus on neurosciences, cardiac care, orthopedics, general medicine, general surgery, women's and children's health, and care for older adults. St. Mary's includes hospitals in Athens, Lavonia and Greensboro, as well as a multi-practice medical group, a retirement community, outpatient care facilities, graduate medical education, and a region-wide home health care/hospice service. St. Mary's Hospital in Athens is a certified chest pain center, a gold-plus hospital for stroke care, and has been named Georgia's Large Hospital of the Year multiple times. For more information, visit St. Mary's website at www.stmaryshealthcaresystem.org.