

Pacific Cardiovascular Associates Medical Group, Inc.

When he conceived of Pacific Cardiovascular Associates Medical Group, Inc. (PCA) in 1985, founder Dr. Joseph M. Ruggio, MD, FACP, FACC, FSCAI, had a vision. “I wanted to bring together the best elements of academic medicine, where I had spent most of my career, and the best elements of both private practice and managed care.” The result was a hybrid group composed of the best of these three forms of delivering health care services committed to practicing high-quality, evidence-based medicine. “We’ve been doing this for years, long before it became a catchall phrase,” explains Dr. Ruggio. “We live and breathe it; we are evangelical about evidence-based practice and the level of care and treatment that we provide.”

Dr. Ruggio, a specialist in interventional cardiology, adheres to the principle of practicing guideline-driven medicine, customized to each patient’s unique needs. Best practice guidelines, he notes, have been developed over the last 20 years by our professional organizations based upon clinical studies of hundreds of thousands of patients. Those validated scientific underpinnings, says the doctor, are the foundation upon which PCA operates. While many medical practitioners strive to incorporate guideline-driven medicine into their work, PCA takes their commitment to a new level: “We don’t just say it; we measure it,” states Dr. Ruggio. By regularly utilizing independently-validated quality outcomes, the doctor and his colleagues ensure that the bar is raised on the quality of care and quality of service that they provide for their patients. “Continuous quality improvement based on measured outcomes is inexplicably linked to the way we provide cardiovascular services,” says the doctor.

PCA is known not only for its commitment to proven high quality care, but also for its ability to practice trans-generational cardiology. “We literally make diagnoses in utero and can follow our patients throughout their lives,” explains Dr. Ruggio. “We relish the ability to care not only for an individual, but for an entire family’s cardiology needs from birth to very advanced age.” This, he notes, is appropriate particularly when genetic predispositions or lifestyle issues facilitate cardiovascular illness. “To be able to manage an entire family’s well-being is a great way to alleviate anxiety,” Dr. Ruggio offers. “Knowing that PCA can handle their entire family’s needs eliminates one source of worry”. PCA is unique outside of major academic medical centers insofar as they have outstanding adult and pediatric cardiologists all working symbiotically together in the same group.

With seven outpatient cardiac centers located from Long Beach to San Clemente, PCA offers patients and referring physicians the convenience of excellent quality of care located on or near the campuses of major hospitals throughout Orange County. “Our physicians hold directorships or are physicians of prominence and responsibility at many of these hospitals,” notes Dr. Ruggio, who adds that physicians and staff alike are held to exceptionally high expectations once they have joined the PCA team. “At all of our outpatient offices”, Dr. Ruggio notes, there is a peerless team of cardiology specialists always available to address the heart needs of referred patients no matter how advanced or complex. All cardiovascular services are available at our outpatient offices and our team of physicians, mid-level professionals, technicians and staff are committed to bringing the PCA brand of excellence to each and every community we serve.

“Our physicians have outstanding, impeccable credentials, but they must also be caring, empathetic and personable,” says Dr. Ruggio. “If they can’t communicate with patients, then they are going to be limited in their capacity to help; a doctor, who cannot enter into a therapeutic relationship with a patient and work together to execute a designated treatment plan, is simply ineffective.”

He adds, “Not a day goes by that I don’t hold what we do here as a sacred trust: our patients expect us to do our very best to help them with and resolve their problems, and their referring physicians can count on us to do exactly that. There is no margin for error when it comes to heart disease. We strive to get it right the first time and become health care partners with our patients and their families. We work not only to accurately diagnose and treat the medical problem, but to alleviate the anxiety and tension that legitimately accompanies the illness.”

This, explains the doctor, is accomplished by maintaining a cohesive and collaborative environment of committed and highly-trained cardiologists, mid-levels and other professional staff within PCA. Non-physician staff complete an intensive training and orientation program which includes extensive instruction on patient interaction as well as how to accommodate patients’ and referring physicians’ needs. The result: “We’re totally unified, in lockstep about our philosophy of practice,” asserts Dr. Ruggio. “Our focus and commitment to high quality patient care is the glue that binds us together. We do the right things for the right reasons and...we do it right!”

At PCA, teams of professionals work together to ensure that every patient’s needs are met. Physician assistants or nurse practitioners work with specialists in primary and secondary prevention, and in maintaining contact and communication with patients nearly continually. Ongoing communication with referring physicians is also a key component of patient well-being; PCA regularly sends educational newsletters to their medical colleagues in order to advise them of current best practices and new technology and to assist them in managing their patients’ cardiovascular health. “Regardless of the specific condition that we’re treating, all of a patient’s doctors must be inextricably linked to treatment and recovery,” observes Dr. Ruggio, who explains his commitment to managing patient health. “Our patients and their families are with us for life,” he says. “We’re living their medical issues along with them. As such, we are highly incentivized to keep them healthy!”

Measuring the quality of patient care and service to patients and their referring physicians is an integral component in fine tuning the level of service that PCA provides. The group incorporates changes as appropriate to optimize care; as Dr. Ruggio explains, “We want to eliminate hassles, especially for patients who are dealing with heart problems. Stress is really the last thing our patients need.” Modifications to the practice include amongst many others, utilizing live operators who answer phone calls within three rings, and who have the sophistication and capacity to effectively and definitively schedule a visit or otherwise manage the patient’s call. “This was an issue that arose from our quality and satisfaction surveys, and we’ve made changes accordingly,” he adds. “*That is service.*”

In keeping with the group’s commitment to offering patients the utmost in high quality care, PCA regularly incorporates new technology into its practices. The physicians are pleased to be involved with clinical trials as well, offering patients the latest procedures and treatment options. Dr. Ruggio points to another invaluable aspect of the physicians’ practices: “You have to care,” he says simply. “When you truly care about your patients’ well being, you’re going to stay current with the literature, you’ll take the time to carefully listen and understand each patients’ problems, take the time to ensure you’ve thoroughly covered all the bases and correctly identified the problem, and ensure that everything within your power will be done to care for that patient.” His colleagues are on board with this, and Dr. Ruggio has imparted and imbedded this philosophy into the many cardiologists he has mentored and trained over his 26 year career.

“I’ve been fortunate to have had some of the finest mentors in the history of cardiology,” he notes. “I think that, in turn, it’s important to act as a mentor to other doctors. I like to think that by example, I can influence someone to be a better cardiologist; I believe that if we have something beneficial to impart to others, it is our obligation to do so. The best gift anyone can ever receive is to be inspired. Besides providing the highest quality of care and highest quality of service for our patients, our mission is to inform, educate, and inspire our colleagues to be better physicians.”