

fifteen years ago, when Craig Shumard, M.D., was in medical school, physicians relied on the treadmill test as a first-line, standard screening tool to detect heart disease. The test is about 70 percent accurate, which means that heart disease in three out of 10 patients could go undetected.

But tests developed since Dr. Shumard's training have given physicians many more options for diagnosing heart disease. One of them is the Cardiolite study – a test which can detect heart disease with about 85 to 90 percent accuracy. The test also is helpful if the treadmill test is seen as too risky for patients with other health problems.

“Treadmill tests used to be one of the standard tools to detect heart disease, but that test could give a false negative. The patient may be sent home

and later die from a heart attack,” said Dr. Shumard, who practices at the Fairbury Clinic P.C., in Fairbury, Neb. “The Cardiolite study

screens out the possibility of significant heart disease with much greater accuracy.”

Keeping physicians updated on changes like these is the goal of the UNMC Center for Continuing Education.

UNMC has provided continuing education programs for decades by filling requests for speakers on a variety of topics. Three years ago, the university made a formal commitment to health providers in rural communities by providing free outreach services.

Leading the program are John Windle, M.D, associate dean for continuing education, UNMC College of Medicine; Larry Willis, Ed.D., director of the UNMC Center for Continuing Education Program; and John Navis, coordinator of UNMC Outreach Services.

“When we surveyed physician interest level, we found continuing medical education came in second to football tickets,” Dr. Windle said with a laugh.

“We view continuing medical education as one of our top priorities. Through this program, we have been able to reach a lot of physicians across the state. They like the personal contact and it gives them a chance to ask questions and get answers specifically about patient care they can use.”

Navis said the driving force is to provide high-quality, relevant educational programs that are of interest to



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Dr. James Lane, Dr. William Haire and John Navis are part of UNMC's Outreach Services team.

health providers. “It's part of our mission to keep health providers updated on cutting-edge health, technology, education and research. Our people are good communicators and are willing to go out and share this information.”

Dr. Shumard said keeping up-to-date adds value to his practice.

“There is constant change in the prescribing practices with the advent of new therapies and medications,” Dr. Shumard said. “Many physicians have tremendous difficulty getting away from their busy practice. Often, these evening meetings offer good opportunities for physicians to ask important questions they have had for some time.”

In the past year, UNMC has presented 67 educational programs to 1,187 physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses and office staff, Navis said.

Topics run the gamut, depending on what is requested. “We ask people to tell us what their group wants to know,” Navis said. “They control the entire subject matter and also appreciate the fact that we're not just providing a program but also providing educational credits as well.”

The program also promotes communication between UNMC faculty and rural physicians.

“Our program strengthens relationships and provides a venue for exchanges of information,” Navis said. “We need that interaction with physicians and health providers outside of Omaha so we remain in tune with what they want from UNMC.”

Program organizers say they are working to make the Internet play a bigger role in the program in hopes that it will reduce more barriers. “We have to think of non-traditional ways to deliver information to save physicians time, travel and money,” Dr. Willis said. “It's the way of the future.” *d*

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