

A Tribute to Dr. Thomas P. Wharton From the Corazon Team

It is with a heavy heart that we at Corazon submit this tribute to a true cardiovascular services pioneer, and one of the most passionate and beloved medical advisors that we have had the privilege to work with, Dr. Thomas P. Wharton.

Dr. Wharton served as a medical advisor with the Corazon team for almost 17 years, working closely with us in efforts to expand access to life-saving angioplasty in the community. He had dedicated much of his interventional cardiology career in leading the way for community hospitals across the country to offer angioplasty without open-heart surgery on site. Much of his dedication and work with Corazon and our clients was spent attending numerous forums to provide expert testimony on the benefits of what was then called “unsupported angioplasty” (UPCI) as many regulatory bodies looked to expand their cardiovascular regulations to accept primary and even elective angioplasty as the “standard of care,” despite the absence of an on-site surgical program. Dr. Wharton was well known for his work with the PAMI-No SOS study (primary angioplasty in acute myocardial infarction at hospitals with no surgery on site versus transfer to surgical centers for primary angioplasty).¹ Thanks in part to his leadership and advocacy, it is well-accepted in the interventional community today that non-emergent coronary interventional procedures in appropriately selected patients can be safe and effective at qualified hospitals without cardiac surgery.

“Working so closely with Dr. Wharton to open the Uniontown Hospital PCI program back in 2003 (and for close to 15 years after with many, many other clients) was such a pleasure – his drive to change accepted practice for patient benefit is part of what made him such a force to be reckoned with in the industry – we were honored to be a part of it. This early work we did together with him no doubt served as a catalyst for many CV programs to advance to where they are today.”

– Karen Hartman, President & CEO

Throughout his career, Dr. Wharton was celebrated with accolades and honored with awards from many cardiovascular societies. He saved countless lives of patients within his local community of Exeter, New Hampshire, where he was an active interventional cardiologist, almost to the time of his passing. Many more lives were saved as a result of his tireless advocacy for PCI in states across the country. Tom was knowledgeable, charming, professional, and without arrogance or his own personal agenda as he met with physicians and hospital leadership throughout his career, whether in agreement

with him or in opposition of his views. His ongoing commitment to Corazon was, without a doubt, an inspirational catalyst for our company’s early work, and for each of us who had the honor and privilege to know him, his legacy lives on in all we do.



Corazon’s Susan Heilman (left) with Dr. Wharton (center) and key members of the Uniontown Hospital team before the opening of the PCI program.



Dr. Wharton (center) with the Cath Lab team and Project Lead Sandy Thorpe (right).

At Corazon’s fall leadership conference in Florida, we screened a promotional video created by one of our Pennsylvania clients who had just launched a PCI program with no on-site surgical backup. The video showed a 40-year old maintenance worker who described how he “just didn’t feel well” when he arrived at work one morning. This gentleman was taken to his hospital’s emergency

department where he was diagnosed as having an active ST-elevation myocardial infarction and taken directly to the cath lab. He ultimately made a full recovery without any residual damage from his myocardial infarction. This patient readily admits that had he needed to leave his organization to be evaluated, he probably would have waited until the end of his shift, which, more than likely, would have cost him his life.

This is just one example, of the literal thousands, of patient outcomes that have been significantly improved by the work of Dr. Wharton. If the rules in Pennsylvania had not been changed many years ago, this man would have been transferred to a hospital over an hour away, causing his time-to-intervention to be significantly longer. This has been the case in many states over the years, where state regulations were changed based upon Dr. Wharton's work and testimony. Even in areas where PCI was not strictly regulated, his experience and insight was often instrumental in changing local cardiology practice.

"Dr. Tom Wharton was instrumental in the development and implementation of quality cardiac care at Uniontown Hospital, and in establishing off-site surgical back-up for PCI. His evidence-based outcome strategy paved the way for us to provide access to advanced cardiac care for our community. Over the past almost 20 years, we have done over 10,000 cardiac cath, still utilizing his quality initiatives. We will always be grateful for Dr. Wharton leading the way for community-based programs like ours to be successful."

– Sandy Thorpe, Executive Director of Critical Care, Uniontown Hospital, Uniontown, Pennsylvania

For those of us at Corazon who worked directly with Dr. Wharton, his loss is more than that of a friend and colleague, but of someone who was willing to challenge the establishment and status quo in true unwavering patient advocacy. This can be rare today, as a new generation of physicians enters a healthcare environment heavy in technology and bureaucracy, with less emphasis on patient empathy.

Dr. Thomas P. Wharton will be deeply missed, but surely celebrated as we continue to promote his generous spirit and passion for angioplasty in the community setting. He would have been humbled by this attention, though grateful for the appreciation, and would've probably given some bit of his expertise to add. He is no longer with us, but his legacy lives on.

Reference:

1. Wharton TP Jr, Grines LL, Turco MA, et al. Primary angioplasty in acute myocardial infarction at hospitals with no surgery on-site (the PAMI-No SOS study) versus transfer to surgical centers for primary angioplasty. *J Am Coll Cardiol.* 2004 Jun 2; 43(11): 1943-1950.

Exeter Hospital Names Cardiovascular Lab in Honor of Dr. Thomas Wharton

In February 2017, Exeter Hospital, Exeter, New Hampshire, announced the naming of its Interventional Cardiovascular Lab in honor of Thomas Wharton, Jr., MD of Core Cardiology, a pioneer in the treatment of myocardial infarction. In recognition of Dr. Wharton's leadership and to acknowledge the tremendous impact he has made to Exeter Hospital and the communities served, the Board of Trustees together with the leadership of Exeter Hospital were pleased to formally name Exeter Hospital's interventional cardiovascular lab the "Thomas P. Wharton, Jr. Cardiovascular Suite."

In addition, the Hospital established The Wharton Fund, which will help to support Dr. Wharton's commitment to the prevention of heart disease along with the continued provision of advanced interventional cardiac services within the local community.

Dr. Wharton first learned of this honor when Kevin Callahan (CEO), Richard Hollister, MD (President, Medical Staff), and a delegation from the hospital made a "house call" to his home.

"I am very surprised and deeply honored by this dedication of the Cardiovascular Suite in my name," said Dr. Wharton. "The honor really should go as well to the hospital's administrative staff who supported us in the early days when what we were doing was so controversial, and to the staffs of the local emergency medical services, the Emergency Department, Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory, Intensive Care Unit, Telemetry Nursing, Cardiac Rehabilitation, and all of my cardiology colleagues."

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