CORAZON

The Service Line Experts

Heart Transplant Program

A large Midwestern tertiary care hospital had established a strong reputation in cardiovascular care, including advanced heart failure management, mechanical circulatory support, ECMO, and ventricular assist devices. Despite these capabilities, the organization's most complex patients requiring heart transplantation were routinely leaving the market for care at competing transplant centers.

Leadership recognized that a heart transplant program represented more than the addition of a single service. It was a strategic decision about the future direction of the cardiovascular service line.

The key question was: **Could the organization transform from a provider of advanced cardiovascular care into a destination center capable of delivering the full continuum of heart failure and transplant services?**

To answer that question, the organization engaged Corazon and Columbia HeartSource (CHS) to evaluate market demand, operational readiness, financial feasibility, and the requirements necessary to build a sustainable transplant program.



Strategic Objectives:

The engagement extended beyond determining whether a transplant program could be financially viable. Leadership sought to understand how transplantation could support a broader destination-service-line strategy by:

- Retaining high-acuity cardiovascular patients currently leaving the market.
- Strengthening physician recruitment and program prestige.
- Expanding the continuum of advanced heart failure services.
- Increasing referral loyalty across the region.
- Establishing the organization as a regional center for complex cardiovascular care.

Heart transplantation was viewed not simply as a procedure program, but as a catalyst for elevated cardiovascular service line positioning.

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Corazon's Approach

Working alongside Columbia HeartSource, Corazon conducted a comprehensive assessment of:

Market Opportunity: Referral patterns, demographics, advanced heart failure prevalence, and transplant migration identified approximately 45 potential transplant candidates annually across the organization's primary and extended markets — a meaningful opportunity to retain patients currently referred outside the market.

Operational Readiness: The team evaluated program infrastructure, physician alignment, staffing, care processes, quality systems, and regulatory requirements. Foundational strengths were significant, but additional investment in transplant leadership, coordination infrastructure, specialty support services, and governance were critical to success.

Financial Modeling: Corazon modeled multiple volume and payer-mix scenarios to assess long-term sustainability, demonstrating a realistic pathway to financial viability and clarifying the startup investments, operational requirements, and growth expectations needed to support the program.

Recommendation:

The study concluded that the organization had the clinical capabilities, market opportunity, and strategic positioning to support a heart transplant program.

More importantly, transplantation could anchor a broader destination-care strategy, letting the organization deliver the full continuum of care for advanced heart failure patients rather than referring them elsewhere at the most critical point.

From Strategy to Execution:

Following the feasibility assessment, the organization moved forward with development of its heart transplant planning efforts, receiving approval in 2022 and successfully completing its first heart transplant in November 2022. *By June 2024, less than two years after launch, the program had successfully completed 30 heart transplants while continuing to expand advanced heart failure services and relationships.*

The program subsequently surpassed 65 heart transplants, establishing itself as a destination for advanced cardiovascular care within the region.

For a more detailed explanation of this Heart Transplant project that involved the expertise of Corazon, call 412.364.8200.

8150 PERRY HWY SUITE 105 PITTSBURGH, PA 15237

p 412.364.8200 *f* 412.364.8201 CORAZONINC.COM