



Common Ground

SACC Provides Culturally Appropriate Cardiovascular Care for South Asians

As with other populations, cardiovascular disease is the #1 killer of South Asians—but when a heart attack, stroke, or other cardiovascular complication affects them, it strikes 10 years earlier, with greater force, and the chances of recovery and survival are significantly lower.

“South Asians account for 25 percent of the world’s population and 60 percent of all cardiovascular disease,” said Santosh G. Menon, MD, FACC, Director, South Asian Cardiovascular Clinic (SACC) at The Christ Hospital and Program Director, Adult Cardiology Fellowship Program.

This is also one of the fastest growing ethnic populations in the US.

In the villages and rural areas of South Asia, individuals have a lower cardiovascular health risk, but that changes with exponential urbanization, sedentary lifestyles, and increased access to fast food. “As individuals relocate to North America, their health risks increase and even accelerate,” said Menon. “And yes, stress plays a huge role and is known to be a major causative risk factor for heart disease among South Asians.”

Conceived in 2019 and fully launched by 2021, the Heart & Vascular Institute established the SACC as a unique medical center and outreach program to address this widespread, yet largely unknown, risk.



The overall goal is raising awareness to reduce risk factors and prevent or limit the effects of heart disease. “As cardiologists, we can certainly address cardiovascular disease by placing stents and performing bypass surgery and catheter treatments,” said Menon. “But our priority is educating this population in prevention, rather than building up a practice to treat the results.”

In addition to a predisposition to cardiovascular disease, South Asians have an extremely high incidence of diabetes—as much as 21 percent, compared with their white counterparts at half that rate. Yet, despite all these risks, they are often more likely to be unaware there is any danger.

Continued on back

South Asian Heart Care: One size does not fit all

The cornerstone of the South Asian Cardiovascular Clinic (SACC) at The Christ Hospital is an ambitious outreach program directed toward the multitude of South Asians in Greater Cincinnati, a population that will typically isolate in small groups.

“South Asians tend to congregate based on their origins, and with upwards of 35 varieties of dialect, the population is highly segmented,” said Santosh G. Menon, MD, FACC, Founder and Director of The Christ Hospital’s South Asian Cardiovascular Clinic. “It’s not been easy, but we’re making headway, I think.”

Menon, a cardiologist at The Christ Hospital for 21 years, said for many South Asians, the hospital’s main campus in Auburn is too far from their homes—and that’s what makes outreach so vital. “Very few of my South Asian patients will come to the main campus, so we expanded the clinic north to Montgomery and another location in Liberty.”

“An American physician will not understand the implications of the South Asian diet and the strong relationship these individuals have with food.”

Dr. Santosh G. Menon

MAY DEI Champion

Continued on back

TCHHN “Upstander Award” Recipients

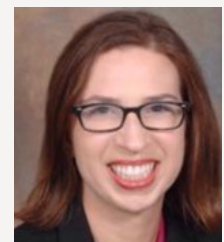
The Upstander Young Professional & Young Adult Awards recognize young individuals in the Tri-state who use their character strengths—such as leadership, teamwork, spirituality, kindness, and social intelligence—to impact the community for the better. From leading community-wide service projects to tackling societal issues, these individuals are giving back and helping others.



For more information about this award, please visit this site.



Dr. Christian Gausvik
Family Medicine, Geriatric Medicine



Dr. Anna Goroncy
*Geriatric Fellowship Program Director
Member of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council*

Continued from front

SACC Provides Culturally Appropriate Cardiovascular Care for South Asians

Many patients who visit the clinic have been told by their doctors that they are thin and healthy. The challenge is communicating a health risk to a population who believes there are no such concerns.

“I’ve learned so much working with Dr. Menon,” said Lauren Thompson, MPH, SACC staff member and Program Assistant, The Heart & Vascular Institute. “For example, obesity is not the first thing that comes to mind with South Asians. But if you were to look internally, they have higher concentrations of fat around their organs, which is extremely dangerous, especially if that fat lies around your heart.”

South Asians have less muscle mass, what we call sarcopenia, and that reduces their overall weight. While Americans’ obesity guidelines are based on BMI, with South Asians, the waist to hip ratio is a more accurate depiction of fat deposits on the internal organs.

As with many cultures, we don’t have to look further than traditional cultural foods and food preparation as part of the problem.

“South Asian ancestors ate a high carbohydrate diet, but they walked extensively and were very active,” said Ankit K. Bhatia, MD, FACC, Advanced Heart Failure & Transplant Cardiologist, who joins Menon as a SACC cardiologist team member. “The high carbohydrate diet, sedentary lifestyles, and high glycemic index foods all contribute to elevated blood sugar—and this causes fats to be stored around the internal organs.”

A typical South Asian diet is extremely low in fiber and exceedingly high in simple carbohydrates—sugar, flour, white pasta, and white rice. Dishes are often fried or baked with ghee or coconut oils. Crunchy or “raw” vegetables are perceived as undercooked, but Menon explained there are cultural reasons for this manner of cooking. “In South Asia, raw and undercooked foods carry many diseases, like hepatitis and typhoid, so vegetables were thoroughly cooked as a wise precaution.”

Bhatia explains that even a minor change in the patient’s day-to-day choices can have a significant impact on their cardiovascular health. “We suggest replacing ghee and coconut oils with olive oils and roasting instead of frying vegetables.”

With education as their focus, Menon and Bhatia partner with many primary care physicians. “We provide adjunct services such as meeting with patients and returning the patient to their care,” said Menon. “We are available as partners in improving the patient’s care and guide them along as they remain with their primary care physician. We just want to help our community.”

South Asian Cardiovascular Clinic Care Team



Santosh G. Menon, MD, FACC
Director, South Asian Cardiovascular Clinic
at The Christ Hospital and
Program Director, Adult Cardiology
Fellowship Program



Ankit K. Bhatia, MD, FACC
Advanced Heart Failure & Transplant
Cardiologist,
The Christ Hospital Health Network



Lauren Thompson,
Program Assistant,
The Christ Hospital Health Network

Rakhi Sristava, MOT, OTR/L,
Exercise Physiologist,
The Christ Hospital Physical and
Occupational Therapy Centers

SACC Locations:



Continued from front

“Communication is key. To make headway in this situation, our most critical mission is to perform outreach and spread the word about these extreme risks—even if the individuals we meet never come to the clinic.”

Dr. Ankit K. Bhatia

The SACC mission is a foundational understanding and respect for South Asian culture. Ankit K. Bhatia, MD, FACC, Advanced Heart Failure & Transplant Cardiologist, joins Menon as a team member at the SACC. He admits that the older the patient, the more likely there are trust issues. “But once individuals meet us and see that we look like them and we respect their heritage, they relax.”

When it comes to discussing changes in a patient’s diet and cooking process, both cardiologists agree that South Asians respond better to a respectful appreciation of the cultural importance of food. “We understand, believe me,” said Menon. “We eat many of the same foods.”

The SACC offers a multitude of community outreach programs and is willing to partner with any physicians, organizations, or employers to reach the community. Recently, they held a free cardiovascular clinic at the Sikh temple in Mason and one in West Chester.

“These events went extremely well, and we are planning on several more,” said Menon. “We just want to empower individuals by educating them about their health, what to ask their doctor, and how to take better care of themselves.”

Along with social media—including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram—the SACC schedules public forums at regional employers. “We do this regularly,” said Menon. “We invite regional employers, community groups, and medical networks to help us share this information. We conduct free cardiovascular clinics and presentations to South Asians and Tri-state physicians. Together, we can make a difference.”

