

# Spotlight on Success

St. Joseph  
Mercy Oakland  
Pontiac, Michigan



**First in the nation.** St. Joseph Mercy Oakland in Pontiac, Michigan – a member of Saint Joseph Mercy Health System – became the first hospital in the U.S. to earn Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Center (TSC) Certification from The Joint Commission in collaboration with the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association (AHA/ASA). “It was a natural progression for us and the right thing to do for our community,” states Connie Parliament, Clinical Director of Neuroscience Services. “We’ve been a Primary Stroke Center since 2004 and were the first in the state of Michigan. With the TSC certification, we have added newer, higher standards of care and enhanced our reputation in the community as the place to go for excellent stroke care.”

## **Q: Why did you choose to pursue Joint Commission certification?**

**A:** Stroke is now the 5th leading cause of death in America and a serious threat to our community. Our executive team has always supported investigating and learning the newest treatments for stroke. Since 2004, when we were certified as a Primary Stroke Center, we have maintained a strong, continuous improvement culture. When we heard that the TSC certification would be available in 2018, we knew we wanted to work toward it. We saw it as an opportunity to create even greater efficiencies of care. We applied in early January 2018 and received our certification two and a half months later.

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“We are very excited to be the first TSC in the country. Achieving Joint Commission certification provides our team with the satisfaction that we have an elite stroke program.”

**Connie Parliament, MSN, RN,  
CNRN  
Clinical Director of Neuroscience  
Services**

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**Q: How would you describe your role in planning and achieving certification?**

**A:** My role was really more of a project manager, communicating the standards to stakeholders and keeping them on task. I didn't have to convince anyone to do this – the executive and clinical leadership were already on board. We knew the program would be launching because we heard The Joint Commission speak about it at the International Stroke Conference in 2017. We were already ramping up our endovascular care to become a Comprehensive Stroke Center; with a few adjustments, we applied for TSC certification instead. It fit our organization perfectly.

**Q: Did you experience any problems or roadblocks in preparing and achieving certification?**

**A:** There were no real challenges for us. We already had a strong stroke program; we just had to review the TSC standards and work with our teams to ensure they were meeting or exceeding them. Our staff had been through several Joint Commission reviews so they knew what to expect. All in all, it was a very relaxed environment. Joint Commission reviewers are very accommodating, more like coaches and educators. There is so much gratification when you tweak a hardwired process; it keeps the team motivated to set our next goal. And we loved the idea of potentially being the first in the nation to earn this certification.

**Q: What organizational benefits do you derive from Joint Commission certification?**

**A:** First of all, preparing for certification helped us address areas of improvement because we are in constant pursuit of improving our outcomes. Second, we are located in a very competitive health care market and TSC-certification is further evidence of our being “stroke experts.” Third, our staff is proud to be associated with a recognized leader in health care quality. Fourth, the EMS organizations recognize our excellence and that is reflected in the greater number of stroke patients they transport to us. And finally, this certification builds confidence in the community. The families of our stroke patients know that whatever can be done is being done for their loved one.

**Q: How do you measure and report the success of certification?**

**A:** In many ways, TSC certification is the measure of our success. As far as what we measure, we are constantly reviewing and improving our door-to-treatment times and our stroke patient volume which has increased steadily since 2004.

As far as reporting and getting the word out on our certification, we do a number of things:

- We continue to emphasize our success for employees and our affiliated physicians through newsletters, executive columns in the press and other vehicles.
- We produce marketing collateral that promotes our stroke program and we place an emphasis on community outreach activities.
- Our physicians and stroke coordinators discuss successes at medical conferences.
- We build and maintain relationships with local EMS agencies. Currently, we are collaborating with a local EMS agency on a clinical study investigating EMS personnel's accuracy of assessing a large vessel occlusion. The purpose is to improve EMS stroke assessments and EMS transport protocols so that acute stroke patients can be taken to the nearest interventional capable hospital.
- We maintain a strong presence in the community, sponsoring local events and sending out a community newsletter which includes patient testimonials and articles that highlight our awards and interventional outcomes.

**Q. What advice would you offer a colleague who is considering TSC certification?**

**A:** It takes a commitment across the entire organization and it's critical to have the buy-in of all stakeholders. Having the support of physician leadership makes a big difference; many of the metrics and documentation requirements are reliant on the physicians, in addition to nursing and ancillary staff involved in the management and care of stroke patients. Having a can-do attitude definitely helps; it made a difference that our hospital has a culture that believes this kind of certification is attainable and that it adds value to the program.

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**For more information on Joint Commission Stroke Certification, please call (630) 792-7291.**

