Wooster Community Hospital (WCH) Chaplain, Terry McLaughlin, was doing his rounds one day last April when he felt a sharp pain between his shoulder blades. He soon found himself in the emergency room (ER). A heart catheterization, performed by Dr. Cyril Ofori at WCH, showed serious blockage in his left anterior artery, known as “the widow maker.”

A couple days later, Dr. Daniel Newton of the Wooster Heart Group placed a stent in McLaughlin’s artery at another area hospital. “Everything was just top-notch,” said McLaughlin. “I was extremely happy that a Wooster Heart Group physician was able to do the procedure at another facility. But it would have been much more convenient if I could have had it done right here (at WCH) while I was on the table for the catheterization. The longer you wait, the more your mind starts to torture you.”

Soon patients like McLaughlin won’t have to leave town for angioplasties and stents. The hospital plans to add two new catheterization labs (cath labs) in early 2016, and is already training nursing staff and the hospital medicine specialists to assist with the procedures.

With a fellowship in interventional cardiology and 12 years of experience under his belt, Dr. Newton is well equipped to head up the new program. “It is unusual and very exciting for a hospital, and for me personally, to start a program like this,” said Newton. “Every interventional cardiologist’s dream is to start a program for a hospital that doesn’t have one—to help the community in that way.”

“About 50-80 patients come into the ER with acute heart attacks each year,” Newton said. “These are the folks who will benefit most from the new procedures.” Currently these patients must be transported 35-40 miles to a larger hospital.

“We think this is unacceptable if we can change it. With a heart attack, every minute counts,” said Dr. Cyril Ofori, a cardiologist with the Wooster Heart Group. “Time is muscle.” Ofori noted that hundreds of patients with less acute symptoms also have to travel for these procedures.

“About 15 years ago, WCH established the cath lab with a goal of providing heart caths and the eventual goal of doing angioplasty so we could have revascularization and timely intervention for people with heart disease,” said Ofori. “Studies over the past ten years have demonstrated the safety of doing these procedures in hospitals like ours, and we have demonstrated our ability to do caths here as it served Terry. We will be well-positioned to do these procedures.”

“This will markedly improve the service we offer to the community,” said Ofori. “Everyone here is very excited.”