A pioneering cardiac service in radial angiography, currently not available elsewhere on the continent, will now be offered at a new cardiac care centre at the Division of Cardiology, Tygerberg Hospital in the Western Cape. Launched on 10 November 2014, the new state-of-the-art facility, under the directive of SUNHEART and the Division of Cardiology, Department of Medicine, Stellenbosch University and Tygerberg Hospital, has seen a multi-million rand investment by key private and public partners, of which Medtronic is the principle partner. This will enable the Division of Cardiology to offer advanced cardiac care to more patients, especially from previously disadvantaged communities in and around the Western Cape, and alleviate current angiography bottlenecks in the region.

SUNHEART is a newly established, not-for-profit foundation that strives for equal access to advanced cardiac care for all patients. ‘In South Africa more than 50 000 patients annually require advanced cardiac care, such as coronary angiography, yet many don’t have access to these procedures and are therefore denied potentially life-saving treatments, including coronary stents. The first dedicated radial suite at the Division of Cardiology will see a significant increase in the number of patients we are able to treat’, says Prof Anton Doubell, head of the Cardiology Division and director of SUNHEART.

Radial angiography allows patients to have coronary angiography and interventions, including stent placement, by accessing a small blood vessel in the arm rather than having to puncture the large blood vessels in the groin. This improvement on the standard approach has markedly increased the safety of the procedure and the comfort of the patient. The new radial suite situated in the angiography theatre complex will allow patients to be admitted and discharged on the same day. ‘Not only are we looking at “business-class coronary intervention” in a state-of-the-art facility, but radial angiography and stenting through our radial suite will significantly reduce the need for an overnight hospital stay’, says Doubell.

‘As we shift to a value-based healthcare culture, the need for innovative solutions that result in high-quality, cost-effective healthcare is more important than ever before. In an effort to improve and shape cardiac healthcare in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, we have invested in SUNHEART by providing the platform to train a significant number of cardiologists on radial techniques in these regions. This entails providing equipment, training workshops, hands-on support, and our expertise in the African market and the cardiovascular business to ensure the sustainability of the unit’, says the managing director of Medtronic South Africa, Mike Howe-Ely, an investment partner in the new facility.

The investment in SUNHEART has seen the building of state-of-the art infrastructure, resulting in an expansion of service delivery and improved workflow. This has meant redesigning the out-patient service, introducing paperless reporting systems, as well as developing echocardiography imaging and stress-test services for an improved ‘one-stop’ patient offering.

Further support for the improvement in service delivery by the unit comes in the form of an innovative outreach programme where consultants render a decentralised cardiology service at referral hospitals, which will improve the access of patients to cardiac care in remote areas outside of Cape Town. An important outcome of this programme is the training of healthcare professionals at these hospitals.

‘By investing in top-quality personnel and through the building of strategic partnerships, this unit has firmly established itself as a cutting-edge institution at the forefront of cardiology service delivery, training and research. SUNHEART is a success story that demonstrates what can be achieved through the building of public–private partnerships’, says Western Cape minister of Health, Theuns Botha. ‘Facilitating the building of partnerships between the public health sector and private funders is an important ingredient in healthcare planning for the future of South Africa.’

SUNHEART is actively investing in research and training aimed at the eradication of diseases that are relevant to the South African and African context. The first SUNHEART-sponsored research project, Echo in Africa (EIA), was launched this year in collaboration with the British Society of Echocardiography. EIA involves the screening of large numbers of school children for rheumatic heart disease.