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SENTARA HEALTHCARE'S PRITIKIN ICR JOURNEY:

REVITALIZING CARDIAC
REHABILITATION ACROSS
THE SYSTEM

JUNE 2025



CASE STUDY

With Support From:



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INTRODUCTION

Pritikin Intensive Cardiac Rehab (ICR) is a comprehensive, Medicare-approved program for patients with cardiovascular conditions. It combines 36 exercise sessions with 36 education sessions focused on nutrition, exercise and a healthy mindset. Studies have shown that Pritikin ICR leads to significant improvements in weight, body mass index, waist circumference, dietary patterns, physical function and health-related quality of life, with greater benefits observed compared to traditional cardiac rehabilitation.¹ Additionally, Pritikin ICR has been associated with a 12% lower all-cause mortality rate compared to traditional cardiac rehabilitation.²

Sentara Healthcare's implementation of the Pritikin ICR program across its 12 hospitals represents a strategic initiative to enhance cardiac care and patient outcomes. This case study describes how, in collaboration with the Pritikin team, Sentara Healthcare's adoption of ICR transformed a diverse set of cardiac rehabilitation programs into a standardized system-wide approach, ensuring a consistent, high-quality and financially sustainable ICR program.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Scalable:** Through Pritikin's operational and clinical support, Sentara Healthcare was able to rapidly expand ICR across multiple locations.
- **Programmatic Versatility:** Pritikin ICR has shown consistent success throughout the entire Sentara system – including diverse settings, patient populations and facility sizes – making it a versatile and effective program for system-wide implementation.
- **Financial Performance:** With higher patient engagement and the increased number of reimbursable sessions offered through ICR, Sentara Healthcare's cardiac rehabilitation programs have shifted from financially underperforming to profitable, with improvements in system-wide revenue and contribution margin.
- **Operational Monitoring:** Pritikin's ongoing partnership provides Sentara Healthcare with operational dashboards, monthly business reviews and tailored support, helping maintain high patient satisfaction and completion rates while ensuring continued program success.



Strategic Planning, Decision-Making and Pilot Programs

Before integrating the Pritikin ICR program, Sentara Healthcare's 12 cardiac rehab locations faced significant challenges. As of 2019, all programs were experiencing financial pressures resulting from insufficient reimbursement and increasing operational costs. Cardiac rehab programs struggled with inconsistent patient education models due to varying staffing levels and facility resources, with many lacking nutrition support as a fundamental component of heart disease management. Additionally, serving both urban and rural populations – each with distinct healthcare priorities – made addressing disparities in patient access and engagement a pressing concern.

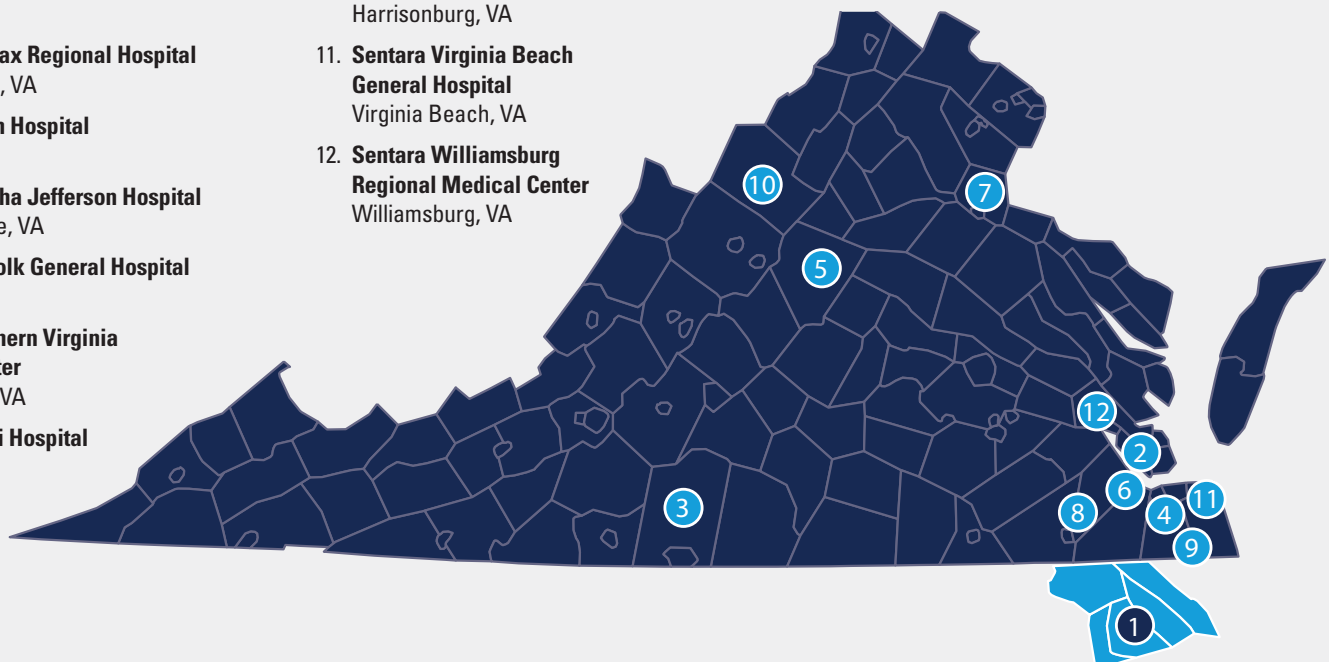
Recognizing the need for a sustainable, standardized approach to cardiac rehab, in 2020, Sentara Healthcare challenged its leadership to consider ways to enhance their programs, improve quality, standardize the patient experience across the system, and make the case for financial investment in programmatic growth. This led Sentara Healthcare to create a dedicated cardiac rehabilitation resource workgroup aimed at exploring various strategies for achieving these objectives, including the addition of Pritikin ICR. Individualized pro forma projections were developed for each location by the Sentara Healthcare finance department.

Sentara Healthcare piloted the Pritikin ICR program at two locations to test the model's effectiveness in different environments. Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital (SMJH), a suburban facility drawing patients from rural communities, integrated Pritikin's comprehensive curriculum beginning in November 2022. In January 2023, CarePlex Hospital, a high-volume urban facility with resource challenges, implemented the program to assess its adaptability. Clinical results at both sites were highly promising: SMJH indicated that patient blood pressures were further reduced by an average of 13%, and CarePlex reported that the percentage of patients who achieved weight loss improved by nearly 35%. Patient satisfaction and program performance were also notable at both locations, with 90% adherence to exercise and education sessions, significantly outperforming previous models.

Given the success of these two pilots, Sentara Healthcare moved up its initial timeline for Pritikin program launches at all subsequent locations across the system, with the goal to complete this strategic initiative by the end of 2024.

SENTARA HEALTHCARE PRITIKIN ICR LOCATIONS

1. **Sentara Albemarle Medical Center**
Elizabeth City, NC
2. **Sentara CarePlex Hospital**
Hampton, VA
3. **Sentara Halifax Regional Hospital**
South Boston, VA
4. **Sentara Leigh Hospital**
Norfolk, VA
5. **Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital**
Charlottesville, VA
6. **Sentara Norfolk General Hospital**
Norfolk, VA
7. **Sentara Northern Virginia Medical Center**
Woodbridge, VA
8. **Sentara Obici Hospital**
Suffolk, VA
9. **Sentara Princess Anne Hospital**
Virginia Beach, VA
10. **Sentara RMH Medical Center**
Harrisonburg, VA
11. **Sentara Virginia Beach General Hospital**
Virginia Beach, VA
12. **Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center**
Williamsburg, VA



“ICR empowers individuals to adopt sustainable, healthy lifestyles, benefiting their well-being and the health of their communities.

**I CANNOT SAY ENOUGH POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT PRITIKIN.
A LIFESAVING PROGRAM.”**

Deepak Talreja, MD, FACC

Chief of Cardiology, Sentara Healthcare and ICR Medical Director, Sentara Healthcare

Expansion of ICR System-Wide

Closely following its successful pilot programs, Sentara Healthcare continued its system-wide rollout of Pritikin ICR across the remaining 10 cardiac rehabilitation locations. To ensure a smooth transition, Sentara Healthcare used a “readiness rubric” developed in conjunction with Pritikin, which evaluated staffing, facility setup, budget and overall engagement at each site. Each program’s readiness score was determined through in-depth, in-person site visits by the Pritikin team. Based on readiness scores, each location was placed into a phased launch plan.

This tactical approach allowed the organization to tailor implementation strategies based on each location’s unique circumstances. In rural areas, such as Sentara Albemarle in Elizabeth City, NC, PritikinLIVE virtual educators were used to address staffing shortages, allowing patients to receive high-quality nutritional guidance despite limited on-site resources. Meanwhile, urban hospitals like Sentara Norfolk General repurposed underused spaces, such as storage rooms, for nutrition demonstration kitchens to enhance the patient experience.

Over an eight-month period, Sentara Healthcare successfully implemented the Pritikin ICR model at all 10 remaining sites. Staff received in-depth training on all components of the Pritikin ICR curriculum. The flexibility of the program made it possible for implementation based on individual facility needs, regardless of staff size or physical space. Through the support and guidance of an Implementation Manager and two Account Managers, Pritikin was a strategic partner in ensuring the timeline and launch plans were successfully executed.

Overcoming Challenges and Driving Success

As the system-wide rollout progressed, the Pritikin team worked closely with Sentara Healthcare to analyze and address site-specific challenges, particularly related to staffing and patient diversity. At locations where on-site dietitians were unavailable, PritikinLIVE educators facilitated virtual cooking classes and one-on-one nutritional assessments, ensuring patients received consistent guidance. By leveraging the bilingual educational materials provided by Pritikin, care teams could reach communities with diverse populations, which improved engagement rates and supported equitable care.

The impact of Pritikin ICR across Sentara Healthcare was profound. A common concern with the Pritikin model is that patients might find the combination of exercise and education overwhelming, making them hesitant to participate in both components. Sentara Healthcare’s program outcomes support the contrary:

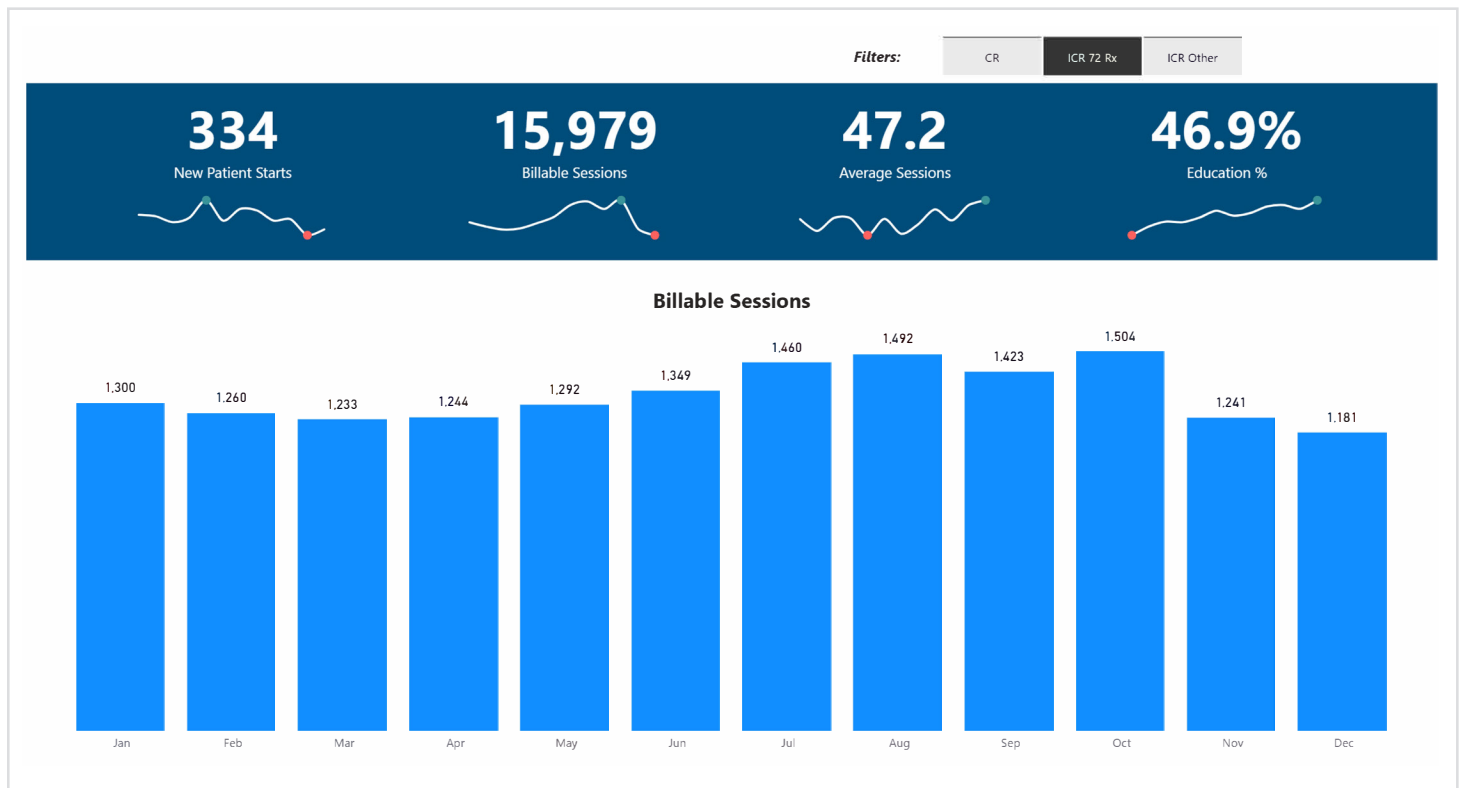
- System-wide, nearly 90% of patient visits successfully integrated both exercise and education.
- Clinical outcomes indicated notable improvements, with patients achieving weight loss and improved blood pressure control.
- Patient testimonials reflected the program’s lasting impact, with individuals highlighting the ease of maintaining dietary changes and long-term weight loss.

SENTARA ICR RESULTS AT A GLANCE

- **Strong Patient Participation:** Sentara Healthcare's programs range in size from 120 patients to over 400 patients annually.
- **High Completion Rates:** Following program ramp-up, patients complete an average of more than 50 sessions.
- **Improved Patient Satisfaction:** Patients report improved quality of life and sustained lifestyle changes.

Beyond patient success, Pritikin provides ongoing support to Sentara Healthcare's cardiac rehab care teams. A dedicated Pritikin Account Manager uses interactive, real-time dashboards during monthly business reviews with each location's respective director, who then shares outcomes with the larger team. This operational dashboard is crucial for tracking and improving key performance indicators and includes new patient starts, billable sessions, average sessions per patient, and education engagement (**Figures 1 and 2**).

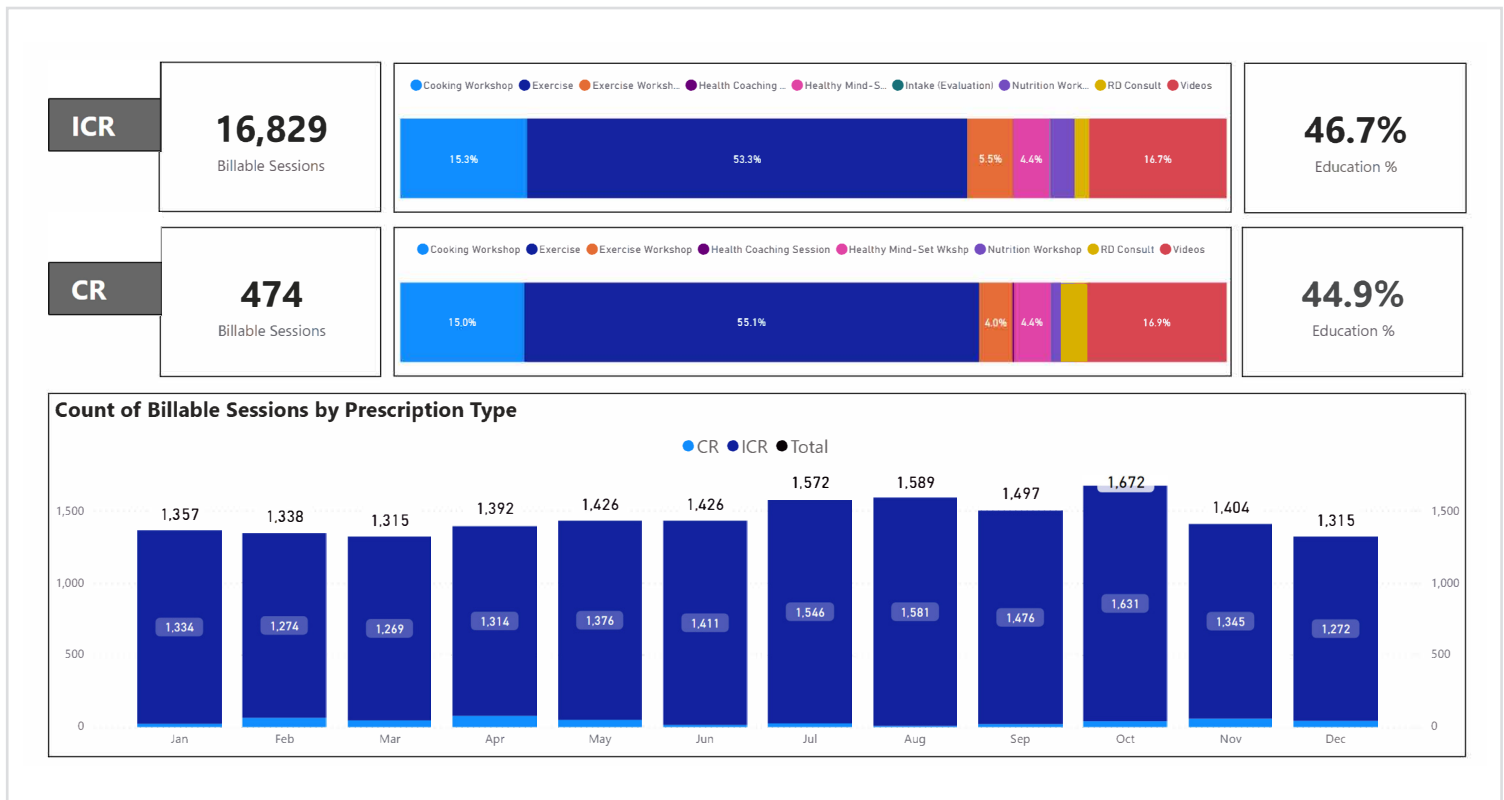
Figure 1: Sample Interactive Executive Summary Dashboard



*"Standardizing cardiac rehab was key to improving outcomes and sustaining our program financially. **Pritikin's lifestyle-focused approach aligned perfectly with our goals,** and their plug-and-play solution helped us enhance care while preserving our culture."*

Laura Decker, MSHA, BSN, RN, NEA-BC
Director of Patient Services, Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital

Figure 2: Sample Billable Sessions Dashboard



"With its comprehensive education, flexible delivery and family engagement, ICR drives significant improvements in patient engagement and outcomes compared to traditional models. This patient-centered approach fosters sustainable lifestyle changes, resulting in positive experiences and enhanced recovery."

Cathy Reece, MA, CCRP

Manager, Health and Wellness, Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital

Financial Benefits

Financially, the transition to Pritikin ICR transformed Sentara's cardiac rehabilitation programs from a loss-generating service line into a profitable one. Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital saw a 350% increase in contribution margin between 2022 and 2024, while system-wide revenue grew by 250%.

Differentiation and Marketing Strategy

Sentara Healthcare strategically positioned the Pritikin ICR program through multiple channels:

- **Customized Flyers:** Pritikin designed a **Phase 1 flyer** tailored to Sentara's needs.
- **Community Outreach:** Health fairs and partnerships promoted the program, with word-of-mouth and cardiologist referrals driving patient enrollment.
- **Physician Engagement:** Strong collaboration with referring physicians ensured a steady patient pipeline.

KEY FINANCIAL ADVANTAGES

- Increased patient capacity through expanded class offerings, boosting revenue generation.
- Expanded patient touchpoints with optimized resource utilization.
- Cost savings through the PritikinLIVE virtual staffing model, offsetting traditional staffing expenses.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of facility size, staffing or patient demographics, Sentara Healthcare successfully implemented Pritikin ICR across all 12 locations, with 10 of these occurring in rapid succession in the span of eight months on the heels of its initial pilots. Through data-driven decision-making and a commitment to patient-centered care, Sentara Healthcare successfully unified its previously disparate CR programs into a standardized system-wide, high-quality, financially viable network. The success of this initiative demonstrates that with the right partner, health systems can overcome longstanding challenges in cardiac rehabilitation and create sustainable, scalable solutions that improve both patient outcomes and financial performance.



REFERENCES

1. Racette SB, Park LK, Rashdi ST, et.al. Benefits of the first Pritikin outpatient intensive cardiac rehabilitation program. *J Cardiopulm Rehabil Prev.* 2022;42:449-455.
2. Husani M, Deych E, Waken RJ, et.al. Intensive versus traditional cardiac rehabilitation: Mortality and cardiovascular outcomes in a 2016–2020 retrospective Medicare cohort. *Circ Cardiovasc Qual Outcomes.* 2023;16(12):e010131.



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ABOUT PRITIKIN ICR As the market leader in intensive cardiac rehabilitation, Pritikin ICR is transforming the cardiac care experience for patients nationwide. Through comprehensive educational resources and innovative virtual solutions, Pritikin ICR empowers care teams to provide a best-in-class cardiac rehabilitation experience while fostering long-term lifestyle change in patients. With twice the number of Medicare-reimbursed sessions as traditional cardiac rehab, Pritikin ICR offers a comprehensive approach which includes not only clinically-supervised exercise, but also nutrition education, cooking classes, and healthy mind-set workshops. Pritikin ICR is rapidly expanding its network of licensed providers, among them physician-owned practices, nationally-recognized heart hospitals, and several of the largest health systems in the country.

Learn more at
pritikinicer.com