

A new age for cancer care...

By Keri Brenner | The Olympian • Published July 30, 2008

This month's opening of a new digital mammogram facility at Capital Medical Center is the last major piece in a 16-month-long, \$19 million odyssey leading to a full-service cancer treatment unit at the west Olympia hospital.

With the launch of Capital Mammography, a state-of-the-art breast cancer screening center, Capital Medical Center is able to offer continuity of care at one location, said Michael Motte, the hospital's CEO.

"It takes a village to cure a cancer patient," Motte said. He said the full-service concept is designed to support patients on an ongoing basis. "Cancer is not an event, it's a process."

Capital Mammography and the \$7 million Capital Radiation Therapy center, which opened in April, are the two newest additions. Both have been integrated into a wing in the hospital that also includes:

- Medical oncology and chemotherapy at Capital Oncology, which opened in May 2007.
- General and surgical oncology from two physician surgical groups, which expanded their offices in March and April 2007.
- South Sound Women's Center, an OB-Gyn practice, which had a major remodeling in March.
- A cancer survivors' holistic education and support program, "The New Face of Cancer," which began in the spring.

While other South Sound medical facilities, including Providence St. Peter Hospital on Olympia's east side, offer similar or related services, the advantage of Capital Medical Center's new unit is "total community involvement," Motte said. "I think having options in the community is a good thing."

Since August 2007, when the hospital became a member of the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance Network, Motte and other hospital officials have been reaching out to join other research and support programs, he said.

Motte said although the major cancer treatment pieces are now in place, the program is still evolving. Two new oncologists are scheduled to come on board — one next month and another this fall. Other new facilities and initiatives also are in the works, he said.

Medical director Dr. Randy Sorum said he is excited about bringing in an advanced, targeted radiation system to Thurston County. The new radiation center includes a \$2.1 million Elektra Synergy machine. The machine uses a 3-D system to allow technicians to target the dose of radiation to a particular tumor.

"The targeted radiation treatment spares the surrounding normal tissue, which equates to less side effects," Sorum said.

Sorum also is offering a high-dose radiation implant treatment for certain types of breast or prostate cancer tumors. With the high doses, fewer courses of radiation treatment are needed, he said.

"A partial breast treatment is given twice a day for five days straight, instead of the conventional five to six weeks daily course of radiation," he said.

In addition, Sorum is making available a "Gamma Knife" radiation treatment used for treating brain tumors. Olympia patients can complete a preparatory consultation at Capital Medical Center, and then receive the "Gamma Knife" treatment at a hospital in Tacoma where the equipment is located.

Patient Nancy Williams of Olympia said she completed a six-week, five-day-a-week course of radiation therapy for breast cancer at Capital Radiation Therapy on July 7. She said a new machine used a computer that continually adjusted the radiation dosage and location.

She said the entire process took about 20 minutes each day. During the treatment, she reclined in a form-fitted cradle to keep her body aligned properly.

"I came in the same time every day, 1 p.m. — just after lunch, but they were ready," said Williams, 72, a retired public school teacher who has volunteered at the hospital for 14 years. "You put on a gown, they zap you, and then you're done, and you come back tomorrow."

Capital Mammography

Mardi Moore, chief mammography technician, said she is enthusiastic about the new digital mammogram the center offers.

The digital technology, which is replacing conventional film breast X-rays, leads to less radiation exposure because the radiologist can manipulate the image instead of having to shoot a new X-ray, Moore said.

Digital mammograms also are more efficient, she said. "With the analog, you had to repeat it, no matter what, and you had to wait while you read it," Moore said. "But with the digital, if there are folds or hair in the way, you can repeat it immediately."

Also, "it's much less time-consuming for the patient," Moore said. "She can be in and out much quicker with the digital versus the analog."

Another advantage is being able to send and store X-ray files electronically. With analog X-rays, patients or couriers had to hand-carry the mammograms to the radiologist who reads the image.

"With digital, we have a computer link to the radiologist's office," Moore said.

Patient Stephanie Forsberg of Shelton said she was impressed with how much more comfortable and quicker the digital mammogram was than the analog X-ray.

"In the past, I felt tugged, pulled and twisted like a piece of Play-Doh," said Forsberg, 60, who experienced her first digital mammogram this month. "This time, they only had to move me once, and I was in position."

She said she hopes the ease of the digital mammograms will persuade more women not to avoid the procedure.

"It was simple, fast and casual," Forsberg said. "I hope more women won't be afraid of getting mammograms now."

The center offers digital mammograms and ultrasound, another diagnostic imaging technique, both by appointment and on a walk-in basis.

At South Sound Women's Center, physicians said they are pleased to be able to send their patients across the hall for a mammogram. Previously, patients had to make an appointment on another day at a facility downtown, taking up more time.

"We are very excited to have state-of-the-art digital imaging right across the hall," said Dr. Debra Johnson of South Sound Women's Center.

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