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Digital Mammography

New system at *Southwest General's Breast Health Center* delivers better images—instantly.

by **KenMcEntee**

Think of how digital cameras have revolutionized the art of picture taking. Unlike photos taken on traditional film, that digital family photo in front of the Grand Canyon can be reviewed and cropped on the spot. And, if Mom blinks, Dad isn't smiling or little Jason is making a goofy face, you can detect it immediately and take another picture.

This same convenience and early detection is now offered for patients needing a mammogram.

"Digital mammography lets us view data faster and allows us to get better detail," explains Young C. Kim, MD, a radiologist at Southwest General's Breast Health Center. "We can conveniently get another look at something that concerns us."

Southwest General recently installed two new digital mammography units, replacing its film-based units.

"We're the only hospital in the southwest suburbs that offers digital mammography," says Barb Demyan, director of Diagnostic Imaging. "Along with our new digital stereotactic biopsy table and breast ultrasound unit, we are a convenient one-stop location that can offer same-day diagnostics for breast examinations."

Although digital imaging doesn't change the examination process—breast compression is still necessary—it does make it quicker and more convenient for patients.

"Since there is no film, the patient doesn't have to wait around for the technician to process it," Demyan explains. "The

image appears within a minute on a computer screen right in the exam room and the tech is always in the room with the patient. The digital images can be sent immediately to the radiologist to read for a much faster diagnostic time. It can reduce the exam time from a half-hour to around 15 minutes."

Digital mammography also has important diagnostic advantages for women with dense breasts—generally women under the age of 50.

While fatty tissue appears black on mammograms, dense tissue appears white—the same color as cancer cells. Unlike traditional film mammograms, digital mammogram images can be adjusted for contrast and the radiologist can zoom in and enlarge specific areas, making it easier to spot irregularities.

If something is spotted in the mammogram, further testing can be done using Southwest General's new ultrasound equipment.

"With traditional film, women sometimes don't know for days whether everything looked normal," Demyan says. "Now we can let you know on the spot and, if it is necessary to have an ultrasound done, we can get it performed right away."

If an abnormality is detected, a biopsy is used to extract some of the abnormal breast tissue to determine whether it's cancerous.

Southwest General's new stereotactic biopsy table, Dr. Kim explains, provides a less invasive biopsy procedure. With the patient lying on the table, a mammogram targets the precise location of the abnormal

tissue and then a series of needle pricks extract the tissue.

"Traditional biopsies are usually done in the operating room and sometimes leave scars and disfigurement," Dr. Kim says. "This process is much less invasive and it is done right at the Breast Health Center under local anesthesia."

The Breast Health Center at Southwest General has been operating since 2000. Along with the new state-of-the-art equipment, the Center recently added a "patient navigator," a nurse who helps educate women about breast cancer detection and treatment.

"Our patient navigator serves as a patient advocate and liaison and lets patients know what to expect and answers any questions they might have," Demyan explains. "The patient navigator also does a lot of community education off site."

Dr. Kim noted that Southwest General plans to add a breast MRI unit along with digital mammography units at its satellite facilities in Strongsville and Brunswick.

The goal at the Breast Health Center, he says, is to detect cancer as early as possible so it can be better managed and treated.

"Younger people tend to put off examinations more than older people," Dr. Kim says. "We hope that the convenience we offer will encourage younger women to get their regular exams."

For more information about the Breast Health Center and Digital Mammography at Southwest General, please call Health Connection at 440-816-5050.

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Southwest General is located at 18697 Bagley Road, in Middleburg Heights.

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