

Green Bay MRI center keeps pace with new machine

NE Wisconsin 3rd to get Panorama 1.0T

By Sean Schultz

sschultz@greenbaypressgazette.com

The original magnetic resonance imaging provider in Green Bay is keeping its place among competitors with the installation of a new high-field open MRI scanner, the Panorama 1.0T from Philips Medical Systems.

Dr. Stephen Somerville, founder and general manager of NE Wisconsin MRI Center, said Green Bay is just the third location in the world to have the scanner available. The others are in Henderson, Nev., and Cologne, Germany.

The 15,000-pound scanner has been installed at NEW MRI's newest location, in the Lombardi Center, behind Margarita's restaurant at 1241 Lombardi Access Road. The center will open in mid-June.

NEW MRI has other scanners at 740 S. Van Buren St., the original site, and at a Bellin site at 2141 Lime Kiln Road.

The 1.0T designation refers to 1.0 Tesla. Tesla is the measure of strength of the scanner's magnetic field. Most of the other scanners in Green Bay are 1.5T. The Panorama's big advantage is its openness, allowed by a vertical coil design. Most MRI scanners are cylindrical with an opening through which the patient is moved to allow access to the area that needs scanning.

"Fifteen to 20 percent of patients reject the cylinder," Somerville said, noting that they feel claustrophobic within its confines. He said NEW MRI purchased an open scanner in recent years, one that has a larger opening to accommodate bigger patients, but its magnet strength is just 0.3 Tesla. "We've been disappointed with the images in general. They're not reliable and we haven't used it much except for large, claustrophobic patients."

One advantage that comes with the new scanner is the viewing stations that will be set up in the physician offices that are referral sources to NEW MRI. "They will be able to view images and can interface with our information system and see a report on the screen as quickly as one hour after the scan," Somerville said.

The Panorama 1.0T retails for close to \$3 million, but NEW MRI obtained it at a lower cost because Philips is using it as a developmental site.

Somerville sees many applications for the new technology. "It will be great for sports medicine and children," he said.

It will be a boon for Green Bay Packers, too. "Large professional athletes have a difficult time sliding into the cylindrical magnet," said Tim Wilmet, center manager.

The new scanner isn't cylindrical and features a table that can be moved backward, forward and from side to side to capture the anatomy to be tested in the isocenter of the magnet. In the tight quarters of the traditional machines, scans were ruined when patients squirmed. "Patient motion is reduced in this one because of less anxiety," Wilmet said.

Philips said the Panorama's unique vertical field design allows the optimal contrast of 1.0T and the high image quality and speed of the 1.5T cylindrical system. Panorama offers a nearly 360-degree view with its "open architecture," Somerville said. That's to the physician's benefit while the patient enjoys a more comfortable experience.

NEW MRI sees potential for the new scanner to serve people from the Fox River Valley, the lakeshore and north, as well as Green Bay. The center, the only one in Green Bay accredited by the American Academy of Radiology, Somerville said, was the first to bring MRI technology to the region, back in 1986-87. Somerville said the average cost for an MRI scan back then was \$900. Today, the cost is about \$1,400, including interpretation.

Utilization of the scanners has soared. In 1987, MRI scans were ordered for 14 out of every 1,000 patients in Wisconsin. Today, 80 residents per 1,000 are scanned each year.

The scans of soft tissue allow radiologists to view blood vessels, the heart and breasts. MRI scans are "becoming the preferred mode of initial evaluations," Somerville said.