

St. Luke receives grant for digital mammography

St. Luke Community Hospital in Ronan has taken a huge step toward getting digital mammography. St. Luke Foundation Director Gayle Wilhelm has been notified that the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust has awarded a \$185,000 grant to the community owned hospital toward purchase of a digital mammography machine.

“Since St. Luke has been in the fore front of providing free screening mammograms for women in the Mission Valley, the Murdock Charitable Trust through this grant demonstrates that it is a strong supporter of women’s health and prevention through early detection,” according to Wilhelm.

The foundation director notes that the Murdock grant is what’s called a “top-off grant” which is “contingent upon us raising the rest of the funds to purchase the machine.” Wilhelm says that with \$30,000 from the St. Luke Employee Giving Program and a recent \$5,000 donation from S&K Technology, the foundation will still need to raise \$150,000 to purchase the digital mammography unit.

Karen Dellwo, fundraising co-chair for the St. Luke Foundation, says, “The new technology will be a HUGE benefit for women who have been going out of the area for a digital mammography.”

There are two advantages to going digital according to Steve Sivak, radiology department manager at St. Luke. One is the ability to manipulate or magnify an image so that a more detailed look at the breast tissue alleviates the need for a “call-back” or second mammogram. “That of course lessens our patients’ exposure to radiation,” Sivak explains.



Pictured is Steve Sivak, head of the Radiology Department at St. Luke, explaining the potential for digital mammography to St. Luke Foundation board member and capital campaign co-chair, Andy Stark (left).

Dr. Breck Howard, the St. Luke Radiologist, is enthusiastic about the digital technology noting that being able to manipulate the images is important since it can give the radiologist a variety of different views with only one X-ray. Plus, he adds, “Because they are electronic, digital mammography images can be transmitted quickly across a network.” That allows for the digital images to be accessible to a consulting specialist in a matter of second or available for a patient who may be out of town and in need instantaneous access to the digital image.

Sivak adds that another upside to digital mammography is an incredibly clear view of dense breast tissue. Marlys Healy, a radiologic technologist at St. Luke, says, “Women with dense breast tissue make up more than 50% of the patients who come in for a mammography.” Because of that, Healy says the new technology can help with early detection.

New St. Luke Foundation board member, Ronan dentist Dr. Steve Culp, is one who definitely believes in catching things early because “dentistry has always been a leader in early

detection.” But closer to home for Steve is the fact that his wife Bobbie was diagnosed with breast cancer in the early 1980s. After a valiant battle with the disease that covered nearly 25 years, Bobbie died in 2007.

“Having a spouse fighting (the final stages of cancer) for nearly seven years, takes a toll on a person’s life,” Dr. Culp noted. He goes on to say that he decided to become involved with the St. Luke Foundation in this digital mammogram project “because I can see how this new technology can help save lives through early detection.”

The Ronan dentist notes that he has gone to digital X-rays in his office and that “digital is definitely the route to go.” He adds that “I’ve seen all of the new equipment (the St. Luke imaging department has) first hand and am extremely impressed with how progressive they are.”

Shane Roberts, CEO at St. Luke, points out that “digital mammography keeps us on the leading edge of early detection with an added bonus of in the long run reducing costs to the patient and to the facility.”

Wilhelm, the St. Luke Foundation Director says that she is quite willing to talk to those who would like to learn more about the digital mammography fundraising efforts. She emphasizes, “The sooner we reach our \$150,000 goal, the sooner we can get digital mammography on-line.”

Anyone interested in how they can support the equipment capital campaign can contact Gayle Wilhelm at 676-4441 ext. 324 or by dialing direct at 528-5324.

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