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TWO NEW MRI MACHINES ENHANCE DIAGNOSTICS AT VICTORIA GENERAL HOSPITAL

VICTORIA - A \$2.5 million installation of two state-of-the-art Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines, and a \$1 million upgrade to the MRI Suite at Victoria General Hospital (VGH) will result in improved care for patients and put VIHA at the forefront of medical imaging in BC.

The \$3.5 million upgrade in equipment and surroundings is expected to increase VIHA's capacity to perform more MRI scans at VGH. Last year, an average of 23 scans were performed daily at VGH, and since May the capacity has already increased to 29 scans. The final volume increase is yet to be determined, but there is the potential for doubled capacity.

"The BC government is committed to improving patients' access to diagnostics and treatment by investing in the very latest medical technology to ensure British Columbians receive the highest quality care available," said George Abbott, Minister of Health. "Since 2001, government has increased the number of MRI scanners in the province by 89 per cent from 8 to 17."

An MRI exam can often take the place of invasive procedures, and multiple other tests, giving a more accurate diagnosis more quickly. Just released in 2006, the new MRI technology at VGH is much faster and because the computing is higher strength, can provide clearer images than before.

"Patients in Victoria and surrounding area will benefit from this investment in advanced medical technology," said Ida Chong, Minister of Community Services and Minister Responsible for Seniors' and Women's Issues. "With these MRI's in place, patients will be able to receive their diagnosis more quickly, and accuracy will be improved."

MRI offers an unparalleled view inside the human body. The level of detail healthcare professionals can see is extraordinary compared with any other medical imaging device. MRI is the method of choice for the diagnosis of many types of injuries and conditions because of the incredible ability to tailor the exam to the particular medical question being asked. By changing exam parameters, the MRI system can cause tissues in the body to take on different appearances.

As well as the addition of the new technology, the existing space went through an upgrade to better accommodate the needs of staff working in the area and the increase of patients through the unit.

"The new 1780 square foot MRI suite at VGH not only allows us to move to state of the art imaging, it also helps us tackle the problem of access to diagnostic care," notes Joe Murphy, Vice President of Operations & Support Services with the Vancouver Island Health Authority. "By incorporating two large and one small magnet in a single suite, we can significantly increase the number of patient procedures and help reduce our wait lists," he adds.

The new scanners will be particularly helpful in diagnosing brain, heart and musculoskeletal problems. In conjunction with radio wave pulses of energy, the MRI scanner can pick out a very small point inside the patient's body and identify what type of tissue it is. MRI systems can also image flowing blood in virtually any part of the body, which allows radiologists to perform studies that show the arterial system in the body, but not the tissue around it.

"Imaging goes through a patient's body point by point, building a map of tissue types in two and 3-dimensional models," says Dr. John Mathieson, Head of Medical Imaging with VIHA. "This is very helpful in determining if something is normal or not."

We will be able to do much more sophisticated studies for patients with strokes, heart failure and heart attacks, arthritis and a wide variety of other illnesses," adds Dr. Mathieson.

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