



Imaging facility continues to improve healthcare for women

Breast cancer awareness month

By: Sara Lavenduski

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As part of breast cancer awareness month, rt image highlights a practice that continues to improve healthcare for women.

A Missouri facility prides itself on providing thorough, quality imaging for women in a comfortable, reassuring environment. When Mark J. Malley, MD, founded Imaging for Women in Kansas City 14 years ago, he used the healthcare experiences of his wife, Luellen Hull, MD, an obstetrician/gynecologist, and her friends as

the primary inspiration.

Before establishing the facility, Dr. Malley researched imaging options for women in the area and knew he could make improvements.

“One of the biggest challenges involved the average amount of time it took for women to schedule screening mammography appointments and breast lump examinations,” says facility administrator Phyllis Fulk. “The average waiting time for screening mammography [exams] was 3 months, while it was at least 6 weeks for an actual diagnostic mammogram when a lump was found during an examination.”

Since Imaging for Women opened its doors, waiting times for women in the area have decreased significantly thanks to local competition among nearby imaging facilities and hospitals. Meanwhile, Imaging for Women continues to meet its goal of providing necessary and timely care.

“If a patient needs an additional work-up while she is here, our patients receive a doctor’s referral for a sonogram, which they undergo on the same day,” says Fulk. “Dr. Malley immediately discusses results with the patients, which are faxed to the referring physician, usually within the hour.”

STAYING COMPETITIVE

The facility offers a plethora of imaging treatment options. In addition to mammography, Imaging for Women provides other services: ultrasound exams, including pelvic and obstetric exams; sonohysterograms; abdominal, aorta, gallbladder, and kidney exams; vascular tests; and diagnoses of lower extremity, venous, carotid, and other arterial, thyroid, and soft tissue abnormalities. Other services include general X-rays, which are available without an appointment and provided to patients’ primary physicians the same day, bone density scans (DEXA), and osteoporosis screenings.



Phyllis Fulk is facility administrator at Imaging for Women. (Courtesy: Imaging for Women)

Imaging for Women uses three General Electric LOGIQ E9 sonography systems to provide agile ultrasound procedures and image quality, regardless of a patient's body type, and digital mammography and bone density machines, says Fulk. To speed up the medical records process, the facility also uses a RIS from MedInformatix Inc., which provides fully integrated health records. In order to ease patients' stress and anxiety, the RIS allows the facility to register and schedule patient treatment sessions quicker, and store patients' poll data concerning wait times and service quality. "It also enables us to submit patients' insurance claims within hours for faster reimbursement," adds Fulk.

SETTING THE BAR

Each technologist at Imaging for Women is certified by the International Society of Clinical Densitometry, and the staff radiologist and 27 other employees perform an average of 200 procedures a day. While there are a few similar facilities in the area as well as two nearby hospitals, Imaging for Women has "markedly increased market competition," says Fulk. "We have seen each [facility] improve care to the patient, as it relates to quickly scheduling mammography screenings and breast exams."

Furthermore, the level of comfort that Imaging for Women provides patients has been replicated at other local healthcare centers. For instance, 5 years ago Imaging for Women began using the MammoPad, a soft foam pad that creates a warm cushion between the patient and the cold, hard mammography machine. Other facilities have taken the cue and started providing MammoPads.

But the top priority for the staff at Imaging for Women is making sure patients receive the care they need. For instance, after they saw a drop in the demand for mammograms following the release of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's changes to its recommended guidelines, staff members began calling patients and emphasizing the importance of disregarding the alterations.

"Both the American College of Radiology and the American Cancer Society continue to support the older guidelines," says Fulk, which staff used to support their case for continuing regular mammograms starting at age 40. Imaging for Women aims to keep making advances to all aspects of the treatment process.

"We have markedly helped improve the quality of medical imaging services for area women and the speed in receiving their results," maintains Fulk. "That's what caring, quality competition will do."

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