New diagnostic tool will mean improved care at QCH

Walkers to end breast cancer help paid for new camera

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Fifty more patients a week will be able to treated at the Queensway-Carleton Hospital with its new nuclear SPECT/CT Gamma camera, paid for by the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation partially through the Weekend to End Breast Cancer fundraising. *Margaret Sambol, This Week*

Breast cancer survivors and walkers in the Weekend to End Breast Cancer got to see their fundraising at work when the Queensway Carleton Hospital unveiled its new diagnostic tool last week: a nuclear SPECT/CT gamma camera.

The $950,000 camera is a hybrid that can do both CT scans and nuclear medicine. It was paid for by the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation with a portion of funds raised from the Weekend to End Breast Cancer.

“Our mission at the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation is to increase cancer survivorship in Eastern Ontario,” says Linda Eagen, ORCF president and CEO.

The camera uses the radioactive isotopes that have been in the news from Chalk River recently.

“Different compounds will go to different organs,” explains Greg Jansson, senior nuclear medicine technologist at the hospital.

The camera will take an image of the distribution of the trace materials in the targeted organ.

Physicians can order tests for a variety of purposes including examining cardiac function, checking if cancer has spread to the bone and identifying sentinel lymph nodes for biopsy. The latter function allows doctors to remove the first lymph node that the breast or prostate drains into to reduce the surgical impact of biopsies.

The camera is not just used for cancer treatment. It can be used for heart disease, liver and lung diseases and injury-related bone scans.

This is the hospital's second nuclear medicine camera, but is improved by having CT capability. This allows the technicians to merge the CT image with the nuclear medicine image for a more precise look inside the body.

This new camera gives the hospital capacity to see an additional 50 patients a week. It also reduces wait times by co-ordinating tests and services all in one site.

"The gamma camera that we have now was so badly needed," says Dr. Doug Mirsky, a breast cancer specialist.

Mirsky and his colleagues will be ordering tests on the camera to look at cardiac function, before and after chemotherapy.

"We can see breast cancer lymphatic drainage and will target these lymph nodes when we do the surgery," Mirsky says. "The same is true for melanoma. The drainage is very complicated, particularly in the lower part of the body. We can expect to see nuclear medicine play a larger and larger role."

This November, the hospital is planning on opening its new cancer care centre, which will specialize in breast, colorectal and prostate cancer.