Improving the Mammography Experience
Making Mammography Better for Patients, Technologists, and Radiologists

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The Lacks Cancer Center at
Saint Mary's Health Care
Grand Rapids, Michigan
There are many resources that go into running a comprehensive, high-quality breast care facility. Two of the most important components are a highly trained and dedicated clinical staff, and state-of-the-art breast imaging technology.

Both can be found in abundance at Saint Mary’s Health Care in Grand Rapids, Michigan. A member of Trinity Health, the fourth largest Catholic healthcare system in the country, Saint Mary’s is an integrated healthcare network that includes a 344-bed acute hospital and The Lacks Cancer Center, which includes its Comprehensive Breast Center. There, Saint Mary’s offers complete breast care in one location staffed by a multidisciplinary team, including dedicated breast radiologists, medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, and West Michigan’s only fellowship-trained breast surgeons. Saint Mary’s invests heavily in attracting the top medical specialists and acquiring the newest technology. Its ultimate goal: to offer patients every available advantage in order to achieve the best possible health. One way it is striving to achieve this goal is offering digital mammography exams on Siemens’ MAMMOMAT® Inspiration.

Saint Mary’s switched from using Hologic digital mammography systems to Siemens in late 2011 and has never looked back. “Getting the Inspiration has been a win/win situation for everyone here, including our technologists, our radiologists, and most importantly our patients,” said Carole Gentry, clinical services manager at the Comprehensive Breast Center. “One of the biggest advantages for us has been the connectivity to our PACS system. We have two reading stations in our Breast Center and one in our main radiology department. It has been much easier for our radiologists to access the digital mammography images from the Inspiration, which certainly helps make their jobs easier. Additionally, it allows them to more quickly provide feedback to the referring physicians who can then communicate the exam results to their patients. That fast turnaround can mean the world to a patient who is anxiously awaiting the results of a mammogram.”

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Carole Gentry, Clinical Services Manager
Preferred by Techs

Few people understand the importance of having the right mammography system more than the technologists who perform patient exams everyday. For that reason, purchasing a system that is easy for technologists to use and that they feel provides the best experience for their patients is a top priority at Saint Mary’s.

“All of our technologists love the Inspiration. In fact, there is always some friendly competition among the staff to get access to the Inspiration over our older mammography systems,” explained Kathy Dereski, lead mammography technologist at the Comprehensive Breast Center. “We see about 70 patients a day and approximately 60% of them are imaged on the Inspiration because that is what our technologists want to use.”

“The Inspiration is much more ergonomically friendly than anything they have ever used,” continued Dereski. “In particular, they say it is less physically taxing because of features like the one-touch button that automatically changes the tube from craniocaudal to medial lateral or medial lateral oblique views. This feature makes it a lot easier for them to make corrections if the view needs to be adjusted. It is also easier to make corrections on the Inspiration’s workstation than on our previous systems. All of this helps us to better position our patients on the system for their exam, which directly impacts the quality of images we can acquire.”

“Having their hands free to change the height of the tube by using the foot pedals is also a huge benefit when trying to position patients. Even something like the magnification table, which is made of a lightweight carbon fiber material and therefore much easier to remove and replace, makes a positive difference in their daily work,” continued Dereski. And because the Inspiration requires calibration quarterly instead of weekly, this frees up a lot of time for Saint Mary’s technologists.
High-Quality Patient Care

While everyone understands the importance of having regular screening mammograms, very few people would describe them as comfortable. Siemens took the concept of patient comfort very seriously when designing the Inspiration, since patients may be more willing to schedule their mammograms without the fear of pain and discomfort.

One feature on the Inspiration that helps improve patient comfort at Saint Mary’s is the speed at which images appear on the workstation for the technologists. Faster image acquisition means a faster mammogram and the sooner a patient can be finished. This has made a positive difference in Saint Mary’s workflow and in the care the staff gives its patients.
"We have been very impressed by the speed of the image acquisition—basically just a few seconds after the image is taken on the system it is available on the workstation. Plus, with the one-touch button we can quickly and easily angle the tube in order to capture the next image," explained Dereski. "The image acquisition speed allows us to perform mammograms in less time, which gives us the opportunity to spend more time talking to our patients and providing more personal care." Because of the improved workflow in the Comprehensive Breast Center, Saint Mary’s plans to schedule more mammography patients, which will lead to better business outcomes.

And what are Saint Mary’s patients saying about the Inspiration? "A lot of our patients tell us that their mammogram took less time and hurt less than they usually do," said Dereski. The Inspiration’s Opcomp® feature is designed to give optimal compression to a patient’s individual breasts, applying compression until the breast is no longer soft and pliable, which can greatly reduce discomfort. And the Opdose® feature automatically selects the breast anode/filter combination for the individual breast characteristics, helping to minimize a patient’s radiation dose and exposure time.
Outstanding Image Quality

At the end of the day, the most important feature on any mammography system is the quality of the images given to the radiologist. So how does the Inspiration stack up at Saint Mary’s? “The image quality of the Inspiration is superb. It combines high contrast with high resolution to achieve visually pleasing images. The skin surface and peripheral breast tissues are seen quite well without the need for windowing. Also, conspicuity of calcifications is markedly improved compared to screen film studies and other digital systems,” says Michael Paciorek, MD, Medical Director, Breast Imaging.

“The image quality is excellent on the Inspiration. In particular, we don’t see any ghosting of previous images, which we’ve experienced with other digital mammography systems,” explained Dereski.
“A colleague at another Trinity hospital told me that he was thinking about getting an Inspiration, and my immediate response was—‘You have to! Once you have one, you will want to get more,’” recalled Gentry. “From our perspective, getting the Inspiration has been a very positive experience. Our technologists like using it, our patients prefer it for their mammograms, and our radiologists are thrilled with the image quality.”

The long-standing relationship between Siemens and Saint Mary’s is strong and continues to grow stronger. Gentry continues, “Partnering with Siemens on upgrading our Comprehensive Breast Center was an excellent decision. Siemens listened to us, addressed all of our needs, and provided us with what we believe is the best mammography solution on the market. We are happy to work with such a leader in the area of women’s health, and look forward to a long, productive relationship.”

“Because the image quality on the Inspiration is so good, there is less need for us to re-image our patients, which eliminates unnecessary dose.”

Kathy Dereski, Lead Mammography Technologist
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