

Hospital adopts new technology for fighting cancer

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Technology drives cancer treatment, and Southwestern Regional Cancer Center has the newest of the new.

Nicole Jolly, marketing director for Southwestern Medical Center, said a team of technicians started installing Image Guided Radiation Therapy at Southwestern Cancer Center Nov. 30.

The new components, which are an upgrade to the existing Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy equipment, will be in use beginning today.

The grand opening will be noon to 1 p.m. Wednesday at Southwestern Regional Cancer Center.

Dr. Troy Richards, medical director of radiation and oncology, said he had several of his patients delay beginning their treatment by a week so he could start them on the new system.

He said older radiation systems use two beams, one from above the patient and one from below. Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy uses just one moving beam. The advantage of IMRT over older systems is it can direct radiation to a significantly tighter area.

IGRT is essentially a targeting system and CT scanner attached to the existing IMRT equipment.

Richards said IGRT is like the difference between carpet bombing and a cruise missile or a shotgun and a sniper rifle. In terms of technology the difference is like comparing a World War II fighter and an F-22 Raptor.

"It's basically computer guidance where before (radiation therapy) was kind of crude," he said.

It takes the computer about a week to calculate the optimum way to apply a given dose of radiation. With the computer targeting the tumor or cancer, doctors can apply significantly higher doses of radiation to a specific area, sparing more of the healthy tissue.

"We can treat things that couldn't be treated before," he said.

One of the biggest advantages of IGRT is its real-time targeting capability. Richards said a tumor can move over time and during a procedure. IGRT tracks the tumor's position in three dimensions.

"This is what people are going to big centers for, and we have it here," he said.

The installation required the cancer center to stop treating patients for an entire week, but IGRT, with its proven higher cure rates and fewer side effects, was worth the wait, he said.

"It's a big expenditure of capital outlay for a hospital. That's why I am so glad that Capella has made such an investment in Lawton," he said.