

Alton Memorial first in area to offer 3D mammograms

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ALTON – Alton Memorial Hospital is the only hospital in the area that uses digital tomosynthesis, which creates a three-dimensional picture of the breast using X-rays.

3D mammography is a revolutionary new screening and diagnostic breast imaging tool to improve the early detection of breast cancer. Images are displayed as a series of thin slices, providing doctors with a clearer view through overlapping breast tissue.

Tomosynthesis builds upon the success of digital mammography allowing radiologists to look at your breast tissue in greater detail. There is no additional compression required and each view takes only a few seconds longer.

“The 3D mammography is much more effective in detecting more breast cancers and reduces false positives by up to 40 percent,” said Stacey Ballard, manager of Medical Imaging at Alton Memorial. “This means one simple thing: early detection.”

Digital tomosynthesis of the breast is different from a standard mammogram in the same way a CT scan of the chest is different from a standard chest X-ray. Or think of the difference between a ball and a circle. One is 3-dimensional, the other is flat.

“Mammography usually takes two X-rays of each breast from different angles: top to bottom and side to side,” Ballard said. “Regular mammography records the pictures on film, and digital mammography records the pictures on the computer. The images are then read by a radiologist.

Digital tomosynthesis is a new kind of test that's trying to overcome the issue of dense breast tissue. It takes multiple X-ray pictures of each breast from many angles. The breast is positioned the same way it is in a conventional mammogram, but only a little pressure is applied — just enough to keep the breast in a stable position during the procedure. The X-ray tube moves in an arc around the breast while 11 images are taken during a 7-second examination. Then the information is sent to a computer, where it is assembled to produce clear, highly focused 3-dimensional images throughout the breast.

Early results with digital tomosynthesis are promising. Researchers believe that this new breast imaging technique will make breast cancers easier to see in dense breast tissue and will make breast screening more comfortable.

For more information, call 618-463-7414 at Alton Memorial Hospital.

Online: www.altonmemorialhospital.org/Medical-Services/Imaging-Center/Diagnostic-Services/Digital-Mammography.