

12/9/2007

RMC unveils heart center

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Staff Reporter

CONYERS - Rockdale Medical Center opened its new and expanded Heart and Vascular Center this week, a move that health care providers said would greatly improve diagnosis and treatment with new, state-of-the-art imaging, diagnostic and treatment system.

Becky Upchurch, RMC director of cardiovascular services, said the purchase of the new equipment, coupled with moving the center into its own space at the hospital, will greatly increase accessibility for physicians to perform cardiac or vascular tests.

Before the new equipment arrived, physicians performing heart procedures in the heart and cardiovascular lab shared space with the hospital's radiology lab. Now with their own location, cardiology doctors will have a single space dedicated solely for heart procedures and will not have to compete for time with radiology.

The new lab and equipment cost a total of \$2.5 million, a price tag that included relocating offices and refurbishing space to perform heart procedures. The new equipment alone cost \$1.1 million, said Deborah Armstrong, RMC vice president for operations.

The RMC Foundation contributed about \$100,000 to the project, Armstrong said.

The new cardiovascular equipment also allows doctors to treat patients right away rather than scheduling a second visit.

"So, if you have a blockage, say, in your leg, and they see it when they do the diagnostic work, they just go right ahead and fix it," Upchurch said.

Upchurch said RMC has gone from handling an average of three cases per day to 15 cases in the four days the new center has been open this week.

A complete system by Siemens has been installed that provides imaging and hemodynamic capabilities. Hemodynamic testing measures the pressures inside the heart's chambers, while the imaging capabilities are much more advanced than the older machines previously used by the hospital, Upchurch said.

However, it is the cardiology archive capabilities of this system that makes RMC's heart and vascular center most efficient.

The system streamlines the work flow with wireless technology and provides highly detailed images from cardiac or vascular studies. Instant access of all the patient's images is available, which can be viewed by cardiologists and surgeons at workstations located throughout the hospital. The reports can also be immediately faxed directly to the patients' referring physicians. This speeds up the turnaround process for patient care, Upchurch said.

"When you come in and have a nuclear stress test or an echocardiogram of your heart, we can actually put those imagines over there and the doctor can see them at the same time he's doing a heart catheterization and compare what he saw on one kind of study with the others," she said. "So, it's really improved our ability to diagnose cardiac conditions."

The Heart and Vascular Center offers the following services: cardiac stress testing, electrocardiogram, holter monitoring, echocardiography, nuclear stress testing, ultrasound studies, Cardiac rehabilitation, and diabetes education. For more information, visit Rockdale Medical Center's Web site at www.rockdalemedicalcenter.org or call 770-918-3000.

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