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**ENTERPRISE**

## HealthCare adds digital mammography machine

By Camden Easterling  
*Enterprise Staff Writer*

Mammograms in Livingston are about to make the digital conversion.

Livingston HealthCare on Monday received its new digital mammography equipment. Livingston Memorial Hospital will begin offering digital mammograms May 11.

The digital technology improves the imaging quality of mammograms, enabling physicians to be more accurate in their diagnoses, Livingston HealthCare staff members say.

"Digital mammograms have clear, high-definition images that make tissue abnormalities easier to see," Dr. Denise Helin, an obstetrician/gynecologist with the health care group, said in a statement from the organization.

The technology also means quicker exams, fewer repeat exams, detailed images and "improved detection for women under 50 and women with dense breast tissue," Helin said.

But does digital technology mean the procedure is more comfortable than with the older machine?

"Not a big difference," laughed Sandi Marlowe, community development director for Livingston HealthCare, on Friday as the equipment was being delivered.

Female staff members have already asked her how the new equipment compares to older technology as far as the compression factor of the procedure is concerned, Marlowe said.

The new machine technically uses less compression than its older counterpart and goes a little faster, but patients probably won't notice a major change, Marlowe said.

Livingston HealthCare in the past has had a full-time radiologist, but the position is vacant now and the group currently is recruiting for a radiologist. In the meantime, visiting radiologists read the mammogram results.

The digital mammography

equipment is part of Livingston HealthCare's larger effort to convert its technology to digital. The group already has purchased digital MRI and CT-SCAN equipment and plans to eventually add other upgraded technology, including radiography equipment.

Digital equipment increases the quality of care, plus it improves Livingston HealthCare's ability to keep electronic health records, Marlowe said. The digital conversion will cost the group about \$900,000, and the group has applied for grants to help cover costs.

Digital equipment should save the group about \$20,000 annually by increasing staff efficiency and cutting costs on the film, chemicals and printing that non-digital technology required, according to the press release.

Before now, if patients wanted digital mammograms, they had to travel to Bozeman or Billings.

Livingston HealthCare previ-

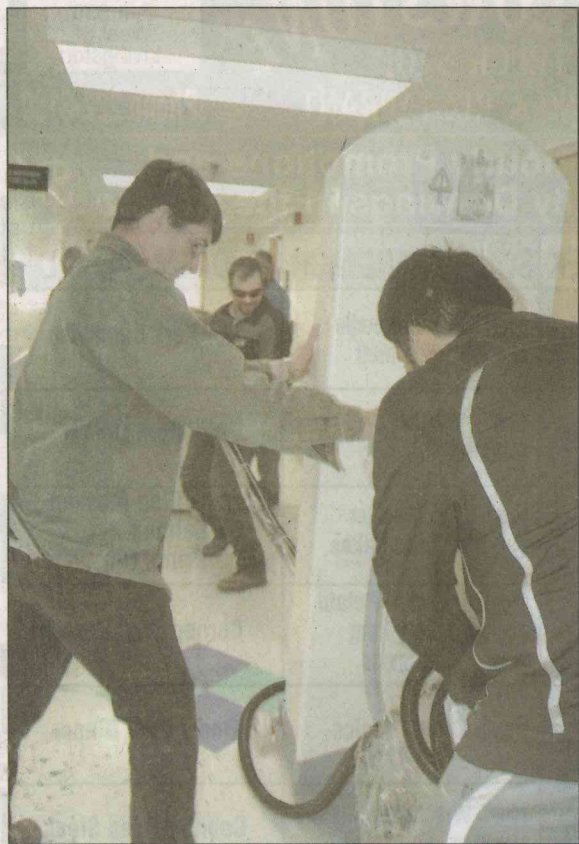
ously used its non-digital equipment to perform about 1,800 mammograms in a typical year, Marlowe said. That number accounts for about 50 percent of the women in Park County who, at ages 40 and up, should be getting the annual procedure, Marlowe said.

"We're a little lower in Park County than we should be," she said. "We would really want that to be 70 percent."

Regular mammograms help with early detection of breast cancer, but some women don't know how critical they can be to a good prognosis or they don't have the financial resources to get them, she said.

Livingston HealthCare plans to work on educating Park County women about the need for regular mammograms as well as the available programs that help patients pay for the procedure, Marlowe said.

To schedule an appointment for a digital mammogram, contact your health care provider or call the hospital at 823-6441.



Enterprise photo by Angela Schneider

A digital mammography machine is moved into Livingston Memorial Hospital, Monday. The machine will use slightly less compression during an exam and will provide more detailed images.