

Pricey new tools to make hospital tops



Mark Patrick photo

Richmond Hospital's chief radiologist Dr. Ian Dunn says Richmond residents will get the best diagnostic medical equipment in the province when a new MRI machine and CT scanner are added as soon as this December.

Multi-million dollar MRI, CT to boost diagnostic capabilities

by Martin van den Hemel

Staff Reporter

When it comes to figuring out what ails you, Richmond Hospital will this December boast two new multi-million dollar tools that will make it the envy of B.C.'s diagnostic medical community.

But first, the hospital needs the help of locals to fundraise for one of the tools, which it's getting for a steal of a deal.

Richmond Hospital Foundation executive director Lisa Westermark said the hospital has an exciting opportunity to purchase a \$1.7 million 128-slice adaptive CT scanner, which will allow diagnostic doctors like chief radiologist Dr. Ian Dunn to better determine what's causing someone's illness or discomfort.

Although the hospital already has a CT scanner, the new one is faster, will benefit more people, and give doctors sharper images on which to base their diagnosis.

And importantly from a health perspective, the new device will use much less radiation—up to 40 per cent lower—and allow radiation to be focused solely on the body part being examined.

The new version will allow doctors to perform procedures it currently can't, such as cardiac imaging, as in case of a heart attack or heart problem, and CT colonography, for diagnosing problems in the human intestine.

In an aging community like Richmond, that's especially significant, Dunn agreed.

The new CT scanner will allow Dunn to pick pre-

cisely which cross-section of a body part he wants to study.

"Certain diseases are better seen in certain imaging planes, which means that I can make a better diagnosis, more accurate, more sensitive," he said.

"The CT scanner is really the workhorse," Westermark said. "It's used constantly."

Three to four dozen people will be able to use the scanner every day in situations ranging from emergency situations, like car accidents, to brain tumours, bowel obstructions and internal bleeding.

The CT scanner will cost the foundation just \$500,000, and although the money isn't yet in hand, it's simply too good of an opportunity to pass up, meaning they're buying the tool in anticipation that locals will once again show their generosity in the latest fundraising campaign.

"We've committed to it, but we desperately need the money" Westermark said. "And because it should come quite quickly, we're in a bit of a hurry."

Come December, locals will no longer need to wonder if they should head to Vancouver General Hospital or elsewhere for the best state-of-the-art equipment tools, as Richmond Hospital will have the best medical gadgets in the province.

Work is currently underway to install a \$2.5 million MRI machine that should be up and running safely in a specially-shielded room that cost \$1.5 million to properly renovate.

Once operational, the MRI machine will serve 4,500 patients a year. Currently, some 1,500 locals leave Richmond annually for an MRI scan.

Both the new CT scanner and MRI machine will also accommodate bigger and heavier people, which may mean referrals from other communities to Richmond.

Westermark said every hospital foundation from now until December will be focused on generating the money for the CT scanner.

"We're really fortunate that the community really does gather together to help us out."