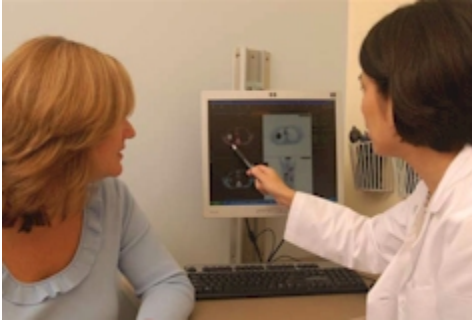


SOUTH SHORE SENIOR NEWS



Local Centers Of Excellence Bring Care To The Community

A Senior News Special Report

By Marie Fricker

News Correspondent

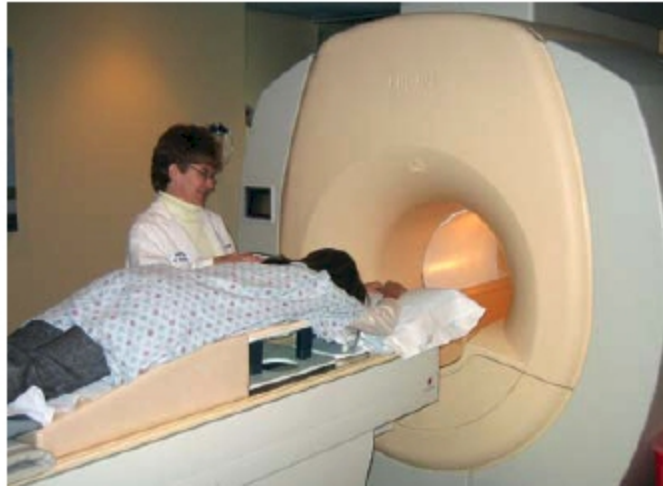
Weymouth - When Christine Fantegrossi was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001, she had enough stresses in her life. Dealing with the rigors of traveling into and out of Boston for daily radiation treatments was not going to be one of them.

“When I got my diagnosis, everyone told me to go downtown to one of the big hospitals,” said Fantegrossi, 57, of Scituate. “So I did, to get a second opinion, but when it came time to choosing a doctor and a treatment center, I picked Dr. Michael Anderson of the Commonwealth Hematology-Oncology in Weymouth and I received my radiation treatments right here on the South Shore. Hopping in my car and driving down Rt. 3A was a lot less harrowing than battling the expressway for 31 days. I never could have handled that.”

The need for more community- based care is being addressed throughout the South Shore as local hospitals and medical groups combine forces to create diagnostic and treatment facilities for major illnesses close to home. Patients now have the option of remaining in familiar territory while battling cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and other life-threatening conditions. This movement is not only a boon to seniors, who may find it harder to navigate to and from Boston, but to all patients who would rather invest less of their day in commuting to their treatments.

In June of 2007, Commonwealth Hematology- Oncology and Atrius Health (the alliance of Dedham Medical Associates, Granite Medical, Harvard Vanguard, South Shore Medical Center and Southboro Medical) joined forces to open the Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center at 51 Performance Drive in Weymouth. The 22,550 sq. ft. facility is the South Shore’s first nonsurgical cancer center offering medical oncology, advanced radiation therapy, computerized diagnostic imaging and other allied health services all under one roof.

“With the opening of this facility, we are making it easier for patients to receive the cutting edge care they need in their own backyard,” said Dr. Claire Fung, director of radiation oncology at the Center. “People from the South Shore now have access to world class treatments and technologies without having to travel far from their support network of family and friends.”



Technologist Marilyn Morgan prepares a patient for a breast MRI at Quincy Medical Center. Photo courtesy of Quincy Medical Center.

Recognized as one of the “Best Doctors in America,” by a panel of her peers, Fung is affiliated with Mass. General Hospital and was previously the medical director of the South Suburban Oncology Center in Quincy. She is also a member of the faculty at Harvard Medical School, her alma mater. “I’m thrilled with our new facility here in Weymouth,” said Fung. “Our philosophy is to provide community care that is as good as anything a patient could receive in Boston, and I believe we do that.”

The majority of patients at the Commonwealth Atrius Center are seniors living on the South Shore and the facility’s proximity to their homes is a big benefit during their treatment, according to Fung. “Because of the newer chemotherapy drugs that we have today, we treat cancers in seniors far more aggressively than we used to,” said Fung. “We get the best cure rates by using a combination of chemo and radiation at the same time, but this kind of regimen can still be debilitating and people feel much more comfortable being close to home where they can rest and recover.”

The Commonwealth Atrius Cancer Center’s radiation oncology suite contains the region’s most sophisticated CT scanning equipment, which allows radiologists to track the movement of tumors during breathing, enabling them to target radiation precisely to the cancer with less chance of harming surrounding tissue.

Dr. Fung is proud of the technology that she and her staff have to work with, but she is careful to keep the “human element” first and foremost in her practice.

“I love my patients and their emotional well-being is just as important to me as their physical health,” she said. “People come to us during a very difficult time in their lives and it means a lot to me to be able to take care of them and see them through it. That’s what makes my work so gratifying.”

Heart Health

Heart disease is another life-threatening illness that patients are able to deal with in their own neighborhood, thanks to the South Shore Hospital's newly expanded Cardiovascular Center for heart and vascular diseases. Celebrating its grand opening in April of 2007, the center offers a team of more than 30 cardiologists, radiologists and vascular surgeons who work closely with a patient's primary care physician to promote the early detection and management of cardiovascular disease.

"We put our center together as a proactive measure," said Bill Burke, administrative director of cardiovascular medicine for South Shore Hospital. "With the aging baby-boomer population, the biggest thing that will affect hospitals in five to 10 years is how we take care of people with heart and vascular diseases. This would put a huge strain on the system if we left it all up to Boston.

According to Burke, the free education programs, cardiovascular screening, blood pressure maintenance and other services at his center should help many people avoid potential cardiovascular disease and lead longer, healthier lives. "We're making people aware of the risk factors for heart disease in hopes of preventing it," said Burke. "Actually, we would like to put ourselves out of business. This is what we were thinking when we built this center. These measures need to be taken now or we will have a real problem on our hands within a few years."

South Shore Hospital's Cardiovascular Center provides diagnostic catheterizations, regular and nuclear stress tests, cardiac and vascular ultrasound, extensive disease management and rehabilitation programs and 24/7 coverage for life-saving emergency angioplasty.

"Time is of the essence in managing cardiac symptoms and this is another advantage of community-based care," said the hospital's media specialist Sarah Darcy. "When someone is having a heart attack, the faster you can get him in and opened up, the more heart tissue you can save and the less recovery time the patient will have. If you live on the South Shore, we can help you faster. And if you need more than what we can offer, we will stabilize you here and get you straight to Boston."

Like Fung, Burke believes seniors, who make up the greatest percentage of his center's cardiovascular patients, are grateful for the convenience of the suburban facility. "A lot of older people have ambulatory issues and other factors that make it difficult for them to park at Boston hospitals and get to and from their treatments," said Burke. "If you're coming from Abington or Stoughton, it can be a three or fourhour timeline from your front door to the cardiologist's office and back. And if a further test is needed, you have to make the trip again, so patients are constantly hustling back and forth. Here at our center, you check into one

place and if you need another test, you have it done that day. We can take a two-week time frame and condense it into a couple of hours.”

The term “MRI,” although it is one of the most accurate medical tests available today, conjures up images of intimidating high tech devices housed in big city hospitals. Not so anymore. An increasing number of South Shore medical facilities are offering state-of-the-art, patientfriendly, MRI (Medical Resonance Imaging) testing closer to home. The Seacoast Advanced Diagnostic Imaging Center in South Plymouth, an affiliate of Weymouth MRI, opened its doors in April of 2007 and is taking referrals of patients from neurologists, orthopedic surgeons, urologists, and primary care physicians throughout Southeastern Massachusetts.

“We scan patients ranging from small children to 100-year-olds,” said David LeClair, marketing manager for the center. “Our atmosphere in Plymouth is extremely welcoming and homey. We understand that getting an MRI can be a scary experience and we strive to make it less so. From the time you come into our waiting area, which looks like a living room, until the time you leave; we pay attention to your comfort, physically and emotionally.”



The patient reception area of South Shore Hospital's Cardiovascular Center. (Photo courtesy of South Shore Hospital).

Besides its close attention to the more “human” aspects of its practice, Seacoast Imaging provides the highest standards of diagnostic MRI and radiography services to its patients. The Plymouth center offers a spacious short bore high field MRI, a multi-slice CT, a walk-in digital X-ray and the region’s first, world class open bore MRI, which can accommodate patients up to 440 pounds in its scanner.

The center’s location near the Pine Hills and other 50+ communities on the South Shore draws many seniors to the services offered there. “For some older people, the thought of having an MRI is a stressful thing,” said Seacoast’s Medical Director, Dr. Gordon Kanzer. “And adding a trip into Boston on top of it would make it more foreboding. The way the world is going today with so much

emphasis on technology, we still need to remember that there is actually a person in the middle of all this, and here at Seacoast, we never forget that.”

Kanzer makes sure his patients are informed every step of the way during their MRI procedures. “We tell them that they will hear a thumping noise during the test, but that nothing will ever touch them,” said Kanzer. “They may bring a favorite CD or we will supply them with headphones and music to select. Our open bore scanner is roomy, even for our largest patients and 60 percent of our tests are done with the person’s head outside the machine. I’m happy to say that our claustrophobic rate is less than one percent.”



A patient consults with Debra Carney while exercising as part of South Shore Hospital's cardiac rehabilitation program. (Photo courtesy of South Shore Hospital).

Still another South Shore medical facility has broken new ground in offering state-of-the-art MRI technology to its patients. In November of 2007, Quincy Medical Center opened one of the region’s first MRI breast imaging facilities, a service, not yet available at the Seacoast or Weymouth MRI centers.

According to guidelines issued by the American Cancer Society, women who have a risk factor of 20 percent or higher for breast cancer may receive annual MRI testing, with their insurance companies picking up the cost.

“New findings came out in March of 2007 that breast MRI is an excellent screening tool for patients with a high risk of cancer,” said Dr. Nanci Mercer, director of breast imaging for QMC. “To be considered at a 20% risk, a woman must have a genetic factor (BRCA-1 or BRCA-

2) for contracting the disease, or have three first degree (mother and sisters) relatives who have had breast cancer. Anyone who meets these criteria is eligible for the MRI testing.”

Mercer also said that insurance companies would authorize the annual MRIs for any woman who has two first degree relatives with breast cancer and one with uterine or ovarian cancer, as well as for any person who has had breast cancer in the past.

Eligibility is also given to women who have one first degree relative who has tested positive for the breast cancer gene and to Hodgkins disease survivors who were treated with radiation between the ages of 10 and 30.

Mercer says it is too early to judge whether QMC's breast imaging center has detected more cases of breast cancer than those discovered through traditional mammography, but she believes the MRIs have aided physicians in determining the extent of the disease and the surgical approach that should be taken.

"There is no doubt that the breast MRIs are saving lives," said Mercer. "With this new technology we are able to see the existence of cancer in areas of the breast that may never have shown up on the mammogram. This helps us determine whether the patient is eligible for breast conservation, such as a lumpectomy, or whether a mastectomy is needed. In many patients, their breast cancer would have been underestimated if they didn't have the MRI."

All of the doctors of these South Shorebased medical facilities share a common goal which is their emphasis on the personal touch that comes along with the community-based care that their centers provide.

For Christine Fantegrossi, the smaller, welcoming atmosphere of her South Shore radiation center made all the difference during her successful battle with breast cancer.

"I went into the Boston hospitals and looked at what they had to offer," said Fantegrossi. "They were big, they were crowded and I felt like a number there. In Weymouth, I felt like family, and that really helped."