Denver "top doc" picks Fujifilm for digital mammography

Well known in the Denver metro area as a "top doc," Dr. Kelly McAleese did not want to risk tarnishing her reputation when leading her medical group into digital mammography.

Her choice of technology? Fujifilm CR mammography (FCR*m*). Her selection was made, however, only after extensive research that included calling mammography luminaries around the country and running all of the major vendors through their paces.

McAleese has been rated by the Denver lifestyle magazine *5280* as one of the top three mammographers in the region every year since 1998. She understands, however, that in selecting digital imaging and PACS technology for her facility, The Women's Imaging Center, she couldn't afford the mistake of choosing the wrong product.

In the financially precarious business of women's imaging, survival hinges on operational efficiency.

"The whole story here is efficiency," said McAleese, who talks as fast as she works. "People don't just sit around."

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McAleese was prepared to dislike digital mammography because of early reports that it slows down radiologists' interpretation of studies. What she has discovered, however, is how much more efficient her technologists have become, and how more information can be extracted from the digital, soft-copy images.

"Soft copy images do take a little more time to read," she said, "but that's more than offset by the extra diagnostic information they provide."

The Women's Imaging Center completed its conversion to digital mammography in late March. It has two FCR*m* units at its main location in central Denver and another at a new facility in the southern suburb of Littleton. Both sites were equipped with Fujifilm's Synapse® PACS at the same time. There is also a Fujifilm DryPix 4000 laser printer in the main center for films requested by surgeons and other referring physicians.

Clinicians see up to 150 patients a day at the main center—at least half of them for diagnostic procedures. Two other radiologists on staff are Dr. Timothy Colt and Dr. Christine Bliven. In addition to digital mammography, services offered at the facility include breast ultrasound, nonsurgical breast biopsy, pelvic and abdominal ultrasound, thyroid ultrasound, and osteoporosis screening.

The Littleton center is focused primarily on screening mammography.

Of all the new capabilities provided by digital mammography, McAleese is especially enamored with the zoom function on her Synapse multi-modality workstation.

"I've always done a lot of magnification views on film mammograms because when you see some calcifications you want to make sure you're not missing others," she explained. "Now when I see them I increase image contrast then zoom in. This ends up minimizing the number of call-backs we have to do."

Another way FCR*m* helps to improve the efficiency of the center is to streamline the diagnostic exams of those patients who are called back. Technologists are able to identify key areas of interest on images at their own Flash IIP*m* workstations, which are sited in the exam rooms, and know that they've correctly localized the exam.

"Because we can manipulate the data, there's not as much need for us to call back patients for more information in the first place," McAleese said.

Before choosing Fujifilm products for its digital mammography and PACS needs, McAleese and her colleagues, operations manager Sandi Macey and chief technologist Shelli Dixon, seriously considered other major vendors.

One company generated what McAleese considered good mammographic images and she liked the equipment design, but it didn't have a PACS product. The other leading vendor had a new product with the large imaging plate she wanted, but had not yet sold many of the products. She wanted a company that could provide a turnkey solution for her centers, and that had users who could vouch for its products.

McAleese spoke with physicists and radiologists at facilities outside Colorado and "they really liked the Fujifilm CR," she said. Users at academic centers who had experience with multiple vendors told her that they believed that Fujifilm would soon have FDA approval for commercial sale and that she should seriously consider it.

"I wanted one manufacturer to be in control of everything—mammography and PACS—so they would know what was going to happen from start to finish," she said. "It became obvious to us that Fujifilm was the best option. Seeing the quality of the images was what finalized things for us." ■