



## Ashley County Medical Center

The MAGNETOM ESSENZA brings Superior Imaging,  
Patient Convenience, and Affordability

Case Study

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Located in Crossett, a small community town in Arkansas, Ashley County Medical Center serves approximately 20,000 people. For the last nearly seven years, the medical center used an onsite 0.35T open Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) system—until area physicians began requesting a higher quality MRI for their patients. “We were doing MRIs here and they were being sent out to the big tertiary care centers for specialists to review,” says Ronnie Dillion, director of radiology at Ashley County Medical Center. “The minute the radiologists saw the images they’d say, ‘look, we need you to re-do the MRI on a 1.5T system.’”

Faced with decreasing referrals, and subsequent reduced revenue, Ashley County Medical Center began to investigate what options were available to a rural, 25-bed critical-access hospital that wanted to replace multiple pieces of equipment over time—and therefore didn’t want to expend a huge portion of its budget or its financing options on one unit. “Our focus is to serve our people in this community in the most cost-effective manner that we can, but without any compromises in quality,” says Russ Sword, chief executive officer of Ashley County Medical Center. “That’s the primary reason we wanted to upgrade our MRI.”

Ashley County Medical Center wasn’t, however, only considering the impact cost had on its operations. It also was cognizant of the impact traveling to a regional referral center, which was about an hour away, had on its patients. “Driving that far really exposes our patients to danger on the highway,” says Sword. “Not to mention the cost of gasoline and other expenses associated with making that trip. We certainly wanted to help our patients avoid those expenses.”

Time was also a factor as many patients had to obtain their MRIs at specialist locations, which were often up to an hour-and-a-half way. “Some of our patients were looking at spending almost a whole day going to have their exams,” continues Dillion. “We knew the time for our old, low-field MRI system had past.”

### Leading Technology Attracts Physicians and Patients

Talking to local technologists as well as the radiologists in the offsite radiology practice that read the scans led the medical center to Siemens. “We looked at other vendors and we’d talk to the radiologists about the equipment specifications,” says Dillion, “but when we’d say we were also looking at Siemens, they would say, ‘You know, that’s good equipment.’ A lot of the radiologists had worked with Siemens before. What they were really excited about, though, were the capabilities of the MAGNETOM ESSENZA.”

The 1.5T MAGNETOM® ESSENZA was developed from the ground up to be an affordable, reliable powerhouse to support the clinical and financial success of healthcare institutions. The system has Siemens unique Tim® (Total imaging matrix) technology, which allows for a flexible combination of up to four different coils, making patient and coil repositioning virtually unnecessary. And, Tim enables Parallel Imaging for reduced acquisition times to offer workflow improvements, increased patient throughput, and an improved bottom line.

From the staff's perspective, the medical center's technologists appreciate the MAGNETOM ESSENZA's IsoCenter Matrix Coil, which optimizes patient positioning and image quality. "It helps a lot just by the fact that you're not handling additional coils," says Dillion. "Before, when we would do a cervical scan, for example, we'd do a marker, scan, move the patient, and put a different coil on, hoping the marker didn't move. Now, we can seamlessly perform multiple scans at the same time without any patient and coil repositioning." According to Dillion, patients have even commented about how fast and comfortably their exams are performed.

And, the MAGNETOM ESSENZA provides a broader range of applications, which can help to enhance business opportunities in small rural communities. Leading technology can often encourage physicians to consider locations, like Crossett, that they may have otherwise overlooked. "Recruiting physicians in rural communities like ours is a fundamental need. To be able to offer this type of technology, the latest technology, is certainly critical in recruiting physicians," says Sword. "For us, orthopedic surgery is a great need. I am hopeful that this unit will enable us to at least open the door to the recruitment of an orthopedic surgeon."

In addition, with the new MRI, Ashley County Medical Center was able to eliminate its patient waiting list and move to same-day imaging—one of its major goals. Imaging capabilities have also been significantly expanded. "Oncologists, orthopedists, podiatrists—they are all very interested in what the MAGNETOM ESSENZA can do. The biggest impact it's had on us so far is the ability to do abdominal imaging that we couldn't do before. All of that imaging was going north to the referral center," says Dillion. "We also anticipate doing more breast MRIs and vascular imaging, which we couldn't do before."

## Affordable to Install, Site, and Maintain

With its affordable price point, the MAGNETOM ESSENZA enables community hospitals like Ashley County Medical Center to provide the leading-edge, high-quality imaging that is making a difference to clinicians—and their patients—around the world. In fact, the system's attractive pricing makes it possible for these hospitals to not only offer the latest MRI technology in their own communities but, in this era of increasing healthcare consumerism, also compete with larger healthcare institutions and outpatient imaging centers.

Yet, as anyone who has priced an MRI is aware, purchase costs are only part of the total financial equation. Designed as a high-quality clinical and business solution, the MAGNETOM ESSENZA has a remarkably small footprint, which also helps to reduce costs associated with siting and installation. Contributing to the ease of installation, the system's magnet weighs just 3.5 tons and has an ultra-short system length of 145 cm. In fact, the minimum opening required to deliver the magnet is 59 inches long by 90 inches wide and 85 inches high.\*

"What drew us to it initially was that it is the most recent technology but the second primary reason was, by going with the MAGNETOM ESSENZA, our construction costs were very, very minimal," says Sword. "Another vendor wanted to charge us \$400,000 to get the building ready for installation. With the MAGNETOM ESSENZA, it only cost us about \$30,000 and our own maintenance staff could do the work."

\*Results may vary. Data on file.



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Russ Sword  
Chief Executive Officer  
Ashley County Medical Center



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Ronnie Dillion  
Director of Radiology  
Ashley County Medical Center

With support from Siemens implementation team, everyone involved in the project—from maintenance staff to technologists—had a good understanding of what would be happening pre- and post-installation. “It’s a big transition when you go from a low-field to a 1.5T system,” says Dillion. “But the implementation team was right there with us, bringing up things we hadn’t thought about. It was a very positive experience.”

Installation day went very smoothly, thanks to the system’s small footprint, which saves both space and set-up time. In the case of Ashley County Medical Center, it took just one day to install the unit with minimal impact on staff and patients. “That was our biggest surprise,” says Dillion. “We had so many naysayers who said a 1.5T system couldn’t be sited in that room. But it fit right into the room where our former 0.35T system was. Now, we actually have a storage room because of the extra space it saved us.”

The system is also designed to save more than space. It is engineered to perform at an optimal operating cost, which could save facilities as much as 50 percent on their MR energy bills, compared to older systems.\* The lower power requirements are partly achieved by the reduced electrical load the system requires. Other 1.5T MRI systems may require up to 110 KVA electrical power while the MAGNETOM ESSENZA operates at just 45 KVA. The unit also features an innovative cooling system that reduces AC load and associated costs, and a zero helium boil-off magnet to ensure maximum uptime.

### Contributing to a Positive Bottom Line

So what impact does investing in a new 1.5T system have on your budget? Ashley County Medical Center did the math and determined even if it only performed the same number of cases that it did on the 0.35T system, the center would breakeven with the MAGNETOM ESSENZA. But the new system is already helping to do more than breakeven; it’s enhancing business by increasing referrals.

“We projected that the system would pay for itself over time and, ultimately, provide a positive bottom line to the hospital,” says Sword. “And, in fact, it’s already accomplishing that” by enabling the center to perform additional imaging, like abdominal, that previously was referred elsewhere.

“The MAGNETOM ESSENZA really adds a lot of credibility to our hospital when people realize that we’ve made this kind of investment in state-of-the-art equipment,” says Dillion. “It makes a great choice for community hospitals. With its higher quality, additional capabilities, and short scheduling times, it’s going to have a big impact on our business.”

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