A Community Hospital Case Study

An Illinois Hospital Enters the Molecular Imaging Era with Advanced SPECT Technology

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Background
St. Alexius Medical Center
Hoffman Estates, IL
321-bed Hospital

Challenge
Competing with regional hospitals by providing advanced technologies

Solution
A pursuit of imaging excellence with the acquisition of Symbia S

Results
Increased patient satisfaction and physician referrals

Imaging Technology That Transforms
Given any opportunity to redefine diagnostic precision, the best hospitals show commitment to their community by staying ahead of the technology curve. In October 2005, such a hospital, St. Alexius Medical Center in Hoffman Estates, IL, was the first site to install a Siemens Symbia® S dual-headed nuclear medicine gamma camera. The benefits of this SPECT (Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography) camera for patients and this community hospital have resulted in a transformation for both. Molecular imaging is now available to the community, and St. Alexius is exceeding the expectations of referring physicians by providing sophisticated imaging capabilities that enhance their diagnostic confidence.

Imaging for Earlier Disease Detection: Promise to Reality
The hospital is already leveraging the SPECT technology to establish a molecular imaging environment for a range of cardiology, oncology, and general nuclear medicine procedures. Molecular imaging technology will enable the physicians at St. Alexius to diagnose disease earlier so the chances for finding effective treatment as well as prevention and prediction techniques are better.

The more than 800 physicians at St. Alexius have been providing healthcare to the residents of their northwest Chicago suburb for more than 20 years. The mission of St. Alexius Medical Center is "to continuously improve the health and wellness of area residents by anticipating the healthcare needs of the community and delivering value-driven, high-quality, safe, compassionate care."

Darius Rubas, Supervisor of the Nuclear Medicine Department at St. Alexius, declares, "We share Siemens' enthusiasm for the latest innovations in equipment that are an important part of fulfilling the hospital and the departmental mission."

Increased Throughput: Patient and Hospital Win
For disease screening and identification, Symbia S technology detects changes in molecular activity before structural changes become visible. This SPECT-only offering provides an entry to the applications of molecular imaging with the option to upgrade to a range of attenuation correction, anatomical mapping, and CT technology at a later date. The system's High-Definition (HD) Dynamic Digital Detectors, Flash 3D technology, workflow automation features, and user-friendly design allow for integration into a variety of clinical settings.

Early detection is only one of the advantages of Symbia. St. Alexius reports imaging at least five patients a week they weren't able to image before installation. Larger patients that were once turned away can now be scanned because of the 450-pound weight limit of the exam table. In addition, with the open gantry the patients have less of a tendency to be claustrophobic.

"Up until we received our Symbia, we could only do patients that did not have to be transferred off a bed. Now we can image for such procedures as hepatobiliary diagnostics and bone scans, as well as accommodate the heavier patients. The Symbia table can support patients that other vendor's tables would not," says Rubas. Symbia's design also allows for easy access and imaging of patients in wheelchairs, stretchers, and beds.

Intuitive Operation, Hands-On Training, and Award-Winning Service: Staff and Hospital Win

The department has taken full advantage of the user-friendly design and industry-leading education programs offered by Siemens. "A technologist doesn't have to spend a great deal of time learning how to use Symbia. It is actually very user-friendly," explains Rubas, "and they have a very good education package for all levels of users. There's the basic level all the way up into advanced applications that allow you to build and write your own workflows. Compared to other equipment manufacturers that I have worked with, the Siemens systems have by far been the easiest to learn and use."

Installation and service of the Symbia and the other nuclear imaging systems has been trouble free. "Installation was a painless experience that was completed ahead of schedule," says Rubas. "As far as service is concerned, it has always been excellent. The best thing is the timely turnaround."

Symbia Applications Support Workflow Efficiency and Patient Care

The connectivity essential to workflow efficiency and revenue enhancement is another advantage of Symbia. With *syngo*®, Siemens unique software platform, physicians use an intuitive interface for easy access to patient data. Additionally, St. Alexius saves time and money since the staff does not have to manually input patient information as before. Workstations are connected to the hospital information system and automatically have patient and metric information from inside and outside the hospital uploaded into the system. "Data transfers that used to take 15 minutes now take 2," explains Rubas.

Well-Positioned for Future Growth

Because St. Alexius is limited spatially for expansion, a future upgrade to Siemens Symbia TruePoint SPECT•CT system is another attractive feature to St. Alexius. The SPECT•CT system from Siemens has a small footprint and represents bigger application potential. "Once we upgrade to the hybrid," says Rubas, "we will be able to use the space as a multi-functional room doing SPECT•CT scans for our oncology and orthopedic departments." The ease with which Symbia can be upgraded to SPECT•CT and its more advanced applications has the Nuclear Medicine Department eager to accelerate the process.

For smaller institutions like St. Alexius, Symbia will help them compete successfully in their market by meeting their community's growing needs for more advanced imaging. "We see this technology taking off and being very important in patient care," says Rubas. "For institutions like ours that don't have the budget to buy a standalone CT scanner and standalone nuclear medicine camera, the upgrade to the combination of the Symbia SPECT•CT is going to work out well. If the numbers are not yet there to do enough CTs, or enough nuclear studies, the combination of the SPECT•CT makes economic sense."

Conclusion

For St. Alexius' Nuclear Medicine Department, installing the Symbia has helped them realize their vision of extending services to a more diverse group of patients. And with that has come a tangible return on its investment. With the imminent upgrade to Symbia SPECT•CT and subsequent entrance into the practice of molecular medicine, St. Alexius' draw in the region will grow stronger while it leverages its ability to provide personalized, predictive medicine. On track with pursuing its vision and leveraging the promise of molecular imaging, St. Alexius' unobstructed view ahead in the technology race is that of a leader!

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Molecular Imaging
2501 N. Barrington Road
Hoffman Estates, IL 60195-5203
USA

Headquarters
Siemens Medical Solutions USA
51 Valley Stream Parkway
Malvern, PA 19355-1406
USA
Telephone: +1-888-826-9702

www.usa.siemens.com/medical