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THE NEW FRONTIER IN BREAST CANCER DETECTION

NEW BREAST MRI CAN DETECT BREAST CANCER INVISIBLE BY MAMMOGRAPHY

New York, NY January 6, 2003 - Until now, the gold standard for breast cancer detection has been mammography. While mammograms still remain a very effective diagnostic tool, they are not the final word in breast cancer detection. **Dr. Mark Novick is a New York City radiologist and medical director of Manhattan East Breast Imaging. His center will be one of only a handful in The United States to possess The Aurora, an MRI scanner specifically designed for, and devoted to Breast Imaging.**

“Our focus since the 70’s, has been to detect breast cancer when it is less than 1 centimeter,” he said. “With the MRI, we’re going to be trying to get it down to 5 millimeters.” Dr. Novick explains that, “while the MRI does not replace standard mammograms and ultrasounds, it will augment those other imaging techniques.

“There will be cancers that are not seen on mammography or ultrasound that MRI can pick up,” Dr. Novick said. Most often it will be used once a woman has been diagnosed with breast cancer, he said. The MRI can better show the extent of the cancer so her doctors can devise the best treatment plan. Preliminary unpublished data from the Faulkner-Sagoff Breast Imaging and Diagnostic Center in Boston show that up to 30% of planned lumpectomies should actually be mastectomies based upon the Aurora breast MRI findings. In fact, he said, at other centers that have installed the dedicated breast MRIs, surgeons grow to rely upon it. “They do not want to operate until they have a breast MRI, to be sure that they’ve done adequate mapping on the breast,” he said.

Dr. Novick will also use the MRI on women with especially dense breast tissue; who have high risk factors, such as a family history or past occurrence of breast cancer; or who have scarring from prior lumpectomies. “The MRI is very helpful to determine if there is a recurrence in that site,” he said, “because a scar and a recurrence can look the same” on other imaging techniques. It is also the best tool to find gel bleed or silicone ruptures in women who have breast implants, he said.

A Breast MRI works by magnetizing the protons in water and fat molecules in the body using radio waves pulsed from a coil within the tube of the magnet to cause the protons to give off radio waves that can then be detected. During a Breast MRI scan, a woman receives an intravenous injection with a contrast agent, a slightly magnetic molecule that acts as a “stain” to illuminate areas of tissue that have many blood vessels. Dr. Novick says that, “since most tumors have a higher blood supply and grow abnormally quickly, the contrast agent will usually make them easier to identify.”

Dr. Novick says that, “although there are no strict guidelines as to who should have a Breast MRI, clinical indications include patients who have a suspicion of cancer, those with a family history or certain genetic markers and those who have been diagnosed with or are in remission from Breast Cancer. Women with dense breasts and women with implants can benefit from this technology. It is felt that a normal Breast MRI Scan rules out the presence of Cancer.

While mammograms can be uncomfortable because they compress the breast(s), the Breast MRI is high on patient comfort both from a physical and mental standpoint. The patient's head is outside of the machine and the technician remains in the room in order to offer guidance and a 'human presence' throughout the process. Hundreds of images are taken during the MRI exam, analyzed by computer and Physician, and compared with the Patient's mammograms and ultrasounds. Despite this lengthy process, Manhattan East Breast Imaging aims to deliver results to patients promptly within 24 hours or less when possible, thus eliminating the dreaded time waiting for a diagnosis.

Believing that this is one of the most promising technological advances in early breast cancer detection, Dr. Novick is at the forefront in terms of possessing this technology. He explains that, "most mammographers are not trained to read MRI scans. MRI trained radiologists are often pre-occupied with several other parts of the body to make the rigors of breast MRI their focus. Because the MRI machine is so costly to purchase, many Radiologists and Imaging Centers rationalize that it is wiser for them to have an MRI machine that is multi-purpose."

Manhattan East Breast Imaging will be open early December, and the center will have an open house, to demonstrate how the machine works. Dr. Novick hopes it will eventually be used 10 times a day.

It was an expensive investment, but Dr. Novick is convinced it will pay off—by allowing him to find cancerous lesions before they spread outside the breast. When Dr. Novick looks at the Breast MRI, he sees the future of *earlier diagnosis* of breast cancer. "The Breast MRI is a life saving medical advance and just the beginning of what is yet to come."

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