Radiologists open a one-stop medical testing center in Merced

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One-stop shopping.

Every shopper wants it, and businesses try to accommodate their clients. And now in Merced, one-stop shopping has come to medical care.

Dr. Steve Hansen and Dr. Duane Richey, both radiologists who practice in Merced, have opened the El Portal Imaging Center in Merced. The center, with a total of four floors, contains everything from mammograms to positron emission tomography, or PET scans. And by June, a new cancer treatment center will also be up and running.

"We wanted a full-service radiology facility in Merced," said Richey. He and Hansen had previously been in a small building across the street from Mercy Medical Center Merced, and they wanted to expand.

In 2003, they decided to build a new center at the Plaza at El Portal on G Street. The building has three stories above ground, and a basement 25 feet underground that will house the cancer treatment area. With about 35,000 square feet, the new center is able to offer just about every type of imaging, along with cancer care.

Hansen said that the imaging available for patients includes digital mammography, PET scans, computed tomography (CT) scans, ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs) and digital X-rays.

The center also houses an endoscopy center run by Dr. Sivakumar Munnangi. The endoscopy area is still under construction, but should be open by March, according to Melissa Kuhno, clinical director for the center.

"We will be also have an outpatient surgery area, where patients will be able to stay up to 23 hours," said Kuhno.

On the imaging side, Richey said that one way he and Hansen have tried to accommodate patients is by having a no-wait mammography area. There are two machines, and patients can come in without an appointment.

The mammography machines are digital, and the two radiologists can instantly view a mammogram, seeing it at a greatly enlarged size.

"We can make sure that the image is good so the patient doesn't get a call to come back," Richey said.

The center is also able to do simple breast biopsies, he added, so patients can have most of their testing done in one place.

The new PET/CT scanner in the building is able to do more than just regular scans.

"We are the most excited about the fact that this scanner can do coronary angiograms too," said Hansen. Instead of an invasive procedure, all the patient gets is an intravenous line. "This is what we've been waiting for," Hansen said.
The radiologists use the PET scan for cancer patients. It shows where cancer is, or isn't, located. The center also has a nuclear medicine camera, used for looking at bones, kidneys and livers. "This camera takes images of how things work (in the body), not just how they look," Hansen said.

The MRI machine at the center is an open MRI, to help patients who are claustrophobic. The machine also is a high-field MRI, meaning that the patient spends less time in the machine.

The two radiologists are happy with the new machines in the center. "We have a lot more confidence about what we are looking at," Hansen said.

While both radiologists wanted a new imaging center, they were also told by many local physicians that the area needed a comprehensive cancer care center.

"There is a lot of out-migration of cancer patients in Merced, going out of town for their care," said Hansen. "The last thing a sick person needs, especially after chemotherapy, is to get in a car and drive a couple of hours."

The cancer center should be open by June, and a radiation oncologist, Dr. Ali Mamoudieh of Roseville, will be running the radiation oncology side. Richey and Hansen said that they are still negotiating with a medical oncologist.

The radiation oncology area is located 25 feet below ground, while the medical oncology patients will be treated on the second floor. The second floor area has 15 treatment areas, including a few enclosed suites for privacy.

"The medical oncology patients will have a great view from the second floor," said Richey.

The center is the biggest building in the Plaza at El Portal. Chuck McMahan, a managing partner at the Plaza, said the plaza is now just about built-out.

"We are in negotiations with an Asian-type restaurant for the one restaurant space we have left," McMahan said. Catholic Healthcare West, Mercy Medical Center Merced's parent company, is putting in a blood-draw station at the plaza, and an oral surgeon will be moving in soon, McMahan said.

Richey and Hansen said that they tried to do what their patients needed and wanted in the new imaging center.

"Patients really like the speed and the service, and the rapid turnaround of reports," Richey said. "If you have a lung nodule, you don't want to wait two weeks for a report. This way, they don't have to."

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