

New System Protects Heart During Radiation

Florida Cancer Specialists & Research Institute discusses technology that ensures patient comfort and safety.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND
Daily Sun Senior Writer

Florida Cancer Specialists & Research Institute recently introduced a non-invasive form of radiation therapy to its repertoire of treatment options.



Carrascosa

The technology, called Surface Guided Radiation Therapy, was added to the Ocala Cancer Center in June and is the first of its kind in Marion County.

The therapy protects the heart from radiation exposure during treatment and makes it more comfortable for the patient. Unlike traditional radiation therapy technology, it's contactless and non-invasive. It provides other benefits to patients as well, including reduced risk of infection for those with weak immune systems and more freedom for claustrophobic patients.

"While highly effective for treating many types of cancer, radiation treatment can present side effects," said Dr. Sachin Kamath, medical director of Radiation Oncology at Florida Cancer Specialists & Research Institute, in a statement. "With our continued investments in advanced technologies such as SGRT, we ensure that our patients receive the safest and most modern therapies to achieve the best possible outcomes."

Previous forms of radiation therapy required technicians to make small but permanent marks on the skin that are used to position patients for treatment.

SGRT uses 3D cameras so the marks are no longer necessary. The system has proven to be a precise and safe way to administer radiation therapy, according to Dr. Luis Carrascosa, a radiation oncologist at the Ocala Cancer Center.

"It allows us to monitor the patient's condition constantly," Carrascosa said. "Studies have shown that by doing this you can prevent the complications commonly associated with radiation."

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Carrascosa said side effects are a particular concern for breast cancer patients, as the heart is close to the left breast. To address this issue, the Ocala Cancer Center was among the first to introduce a technique called Deep Inspiration Breath Hold, which involves taking a deep breath to move the breast away from the heart during radiation therapy.

At the Ocala Cancer Center, SGRT is predominately used for breast, head and neck cancer patients.

"(The marks) were small tattoos, but they were a permanent reminder of what the patient went through during cancer treatment," Carrascosa said. "We don't want that."

Carrascosa said the system allows the team at Ocala Cancer Center to administer radiation therapy with higher confidence than before, because the system immediately shuts itself off if a patient makes any sudden

movement and is no longer in the right position.

SGRT also limits pain and discomfort, and Carrascosa has observed a marked improvement in head and neck cancer patients. Traditional radiation therapy systems require patients to wear an enclosed mask, which can be frightening for claustrophobic patients. SGRT allows for an open mask that only covers the top of the head and the chin.

"This is a great addition to the center," Carrascosa said. "It's not something that is going to cure people more, but it will make the

RADIATION EXPOSURE

A 30-year review of published data on safety in radiation therapy from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality found that the overall incidence of errors was relatively low, estimated at 1500 per 1 million treatment courses. However, this number is likely an underestimate, since there is currently no mandatory reporting standard for injuries due to radiation therapy.

Nearly half of the radiation exposure the American public experiences comes from medical sources according to the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements. Most medical exposure comes from the use of standard x-rays and CT scans to diagnose injuries and diseases in patients.

treatment more comfortable and have fewer side effects."

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