
New MRI machine will help Memphis VA hospital

By Daniel Connolly

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Doctors at the Memphis Veterans Medical Center say a new magnetic resonance imaging device should help them diagnose a wide range of illnesses, including those of patients who suffered brain injuries in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Traumatic brain injury is a big thing on the horizon for us," said Dr. John R. Ware, chief of the hospital's radiology section. "This is very sensitive imaging for that type of injury."

Head injuries from blasts are causing lingering problems for many veterans returning from the wars. The new MRI machine produces slightly better images than the VA's existing MRI and can help doctors spot small areas of brain damage, Ware said.

The VA held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday to celebrate the new device, which lets technicians "slice" through three-dimensional images of body parts such as the brain, spine and knee.

Doctors use MRI scans to diagnose a wide range of problems, from cancer to orthopedic issues.

The VA applied for a new MRI machine because so many patients needed the scans that it was spending extra to send them for tests at other facilities, said Steve Hillis, chief business officer at the VA's Memphis facility.

Having an in-house device will save at least \$300,000 per year and the two machines are each expected to handle 15 patients per day, he said.

Another advantage is that the MRI's output is linked directly into the VA's electronic medical records system, said Marlin Angell, the Memphis VA's associate director and chief operating officer.

That wasn't the case when other clinics handled that work.

The machine's \$4.3 million cost was paid for jointly by the Department of Veterans Affairs, which provides medical care to former members of the military, and the

Department of Defense.

In addition to serving veterans, the MRI device will be used to diagnose active-duty Navy personnel and their families referred from Millington, said Cmdr. Richelle Kay, officer in charge of the the Naval branch health clinic there.

Applying for the funds took months, and Kay said she's happy to see the project completed.

"Being on a three-year tour, you don't always get to see the start and the finish of it, and for me, I'm very lucky," she said.

Diagnostic tools

MRI devices can help diagnose problems in the bone and soft tissue, including the brain, spine, knee joint and key blood vessels.

The new MRI device from [GE Healthcare](#) can easily identify small blood clots in a patient's brain.



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