

New procedure adds color to breast cancer detection

Shands Jacksonville says software and dye enhance MRI view of tissue.

By **CHERIE BLACK**
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Radiologists at Shands Jacksonville are using new technology they say better helps them detect breast cancer.

A new software recently implemented at the hospital's Breast Health Center now color codes abnormalities shown on test results, making it easier, radiologists say, to detect problems. Called 3TP, which stands for three time point, patients are injected with a dye and scanned using magnetic resonance imaging or MRI.

The software analyzes three images and assigns a color to what it sees. The color blue shows the area is not cancerous, green if it is slightly abnormal and red if it is cancerous, said Arnold Friedman, chief of radiology at Shands Jacksonville.

He said the software also

reduces the amount of time radiologists spend looking through thousands of pictures searching for suspicious areas.

"What 3TP does is color code the breast so you can get an answer right away," Friedman said. "It makes it easy to read and easy to interpret, making it better for patients."

The software, approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, also gives physicians a report card of the percentage of red, blue or green found on the breast image, Friedman said. It costs about \$50,000 and was purchased with \$105,000 recently donated from the Research Is The Answer Foundation.

The cost of 3TP for patients is about \$700, Friedman said, and not all insurance companies will pay for it. He said often the carrier will refuse at first, but will pay after negotiations.

Physicians say software such as 3TP should not be the deciding factor when looking at a patient's MRI, it should be used instead as "secondary information."

"A lot of computer software is used for reassurance," said Elizabeth DePeri, director of breast imaging at Mayo Clinic Jacksonville. "Breast MRIs are hard to read. It's another perk to help in what is a difficult task. Relying on it would be harmful, though. It's not going to give an answer that wasn't already there."

3TP is ideal for women at high risk for breast cancer and those who have already been diagnosed with cancer in one breast, said Susan Snodgrass, a radiologist at Shands Jacksonville. It can be used as a follow-up test to confirm or exclude a diagnosis of breast cancer after a mammogram, she said. The results reduce the chances of needing unnecessary biopsies or follow-up exams, she said.

"If we had a question about an area, it really is fail-safe to some degree," Snodgrass said. "I don't think anything is fool-proof, but this is a step in the right direction."

cherie.black@jacksonville.com,
(904) 359-4504