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Permanent MRI service under way at EKRH

CRANBROOK – Residents of East Kootenay now have increased access to diagnostic testing within the region with a new, permanent MRI machine, which began operating at East Kootenay Regional Hospital on June 11.

“This new permanent MRI service will more than double the number of exams performed at East Kootenay Regional Hospital, increasing access for hundreds of East Kootenay residents closer to home,” says Health Minister Adrian Dix. “The new MRI supports our B.C. Surgical and Diagnostic Imaging Strategy and is part of our commitment to an approximate 20 per cent increase in MRI exams across BC this year, which will reduce the uncertainty and pain caused by long waits for this important diagnostic service.”

Interior Health expects MRI testing in Cranbrook will increase from approximately 1,300 to more than 3,000 annual exams.

“MRI is a critical medical imaging tool that assists our clinicians in making a clear diagnosis for their patients,” says Interior Health Board Chair Dr. Doug Cochrane. “This is great news for residents of the East Kootenay, who will have access to this testing sooner and receive the definitive treatment they need faster.”

Total project cost – for the MRI suite and the MRI machine – was \$5.65 million. The Province/Interior Health contributed \$2.21 million; Kootenay East Regional Hospital District (KERHD) \$2.14 million; East Kootenay Foundation for Health (EKFH) \$650,000 – which included a \$100,000 contribution from the Kimberley Health Care Auxiliary, \$50,000 from the Invermere Health Care Auxiliary, \$25,000 from the Elk Valley Foundation, and \$100,000 from the Fostering the Future Foundation; and Cranbrook Health Care Auxiliary (CHCA) \$650,000.

“Our Board is committed to supporting projects that have a direct impact on patient care in this region, and we are proud to be funding partners on this vital new service,” says KERHD Board Chair Dean McKerracher. “We would like to thank the Ministry of Health, Interior Health and all the other funders who’ve joined together to make this project a reality.”

“Over the past number of years we have received countless questions about when our region would get a permanent MRI. Supporting the MRI project was a no-brainer for the East Kootenay Foundation for Health, as it will greatly improve health care in our region,” says Wes Rogers, EKFH board chair. “Thanks to the excitement about this campaign and the generosity of our donors, we reached our \$650,000 goal in just five months.”



Auxiliary volunteers and donors also got 100 per cent behind its \$650,000 fundraising campaign.

“Cranbrook Health Care Auxiliary’s entire membership was in full support of contributing toward the MRI installation from the moment we learned that it was possible for our regional hospital,” said Bonnie Close, past president. “The members worked hard to raise funds and they appreciate all the contributions received towards this special project.”

In March 2018, government announced a surgical and diagnostic imaging strategy, which will improve timely access to surgery through a more efficient surgical system, and will help the Province catch up with and keep up with demand, starting with hip and knee replacement surgery and dental surgery. It will also improve the patient’s experience, by focusing on improving surgical pathways, co-ordination of care and information provided to patients. As part of the strategy, Interior Health will also see a 25.5% increase in MRI exams, for a total of 26,000 in 2018-19. Approximately \$11 million in funding is being made available to increase MRI capacity provincewide in the public-health system, and achieve a total of 225,000 MRI exams in 2018-19.

The new permanent MRI machine replaces a shared mobile MRI unit that previously served East Kootenay Regional Hospital for one week every four weeks. The shared mobile unit will now provide improved access to MRI testing at Kootenay Boundary Regional Hospital in Trail and Penticton Regional Hospital.

TA Rendek and Associates Ltd. was the general contractor who oversaw the construction of the new MRI space – an approximate 200 square metre (2,150 square foot) addition on the east side of EKRH adjacent to the intensive care unit.

Background

MRI, or Magnetic Resonance Imaging, is a safe and painless test that uses a magnetic field and radio waves to produce detailed pictures of the body's organs and structures. MRIs are used to diagnose a number of medical conditions, including abnormalities of the brain, as well as tumors, cysts and soft-tissue injuries in other parts of the body. MRI scans are important diagnostic tools that do not use radiation; however, other types of diagnostic imaging – x-ray, ultrasound, or computed tomography (CT) – are more appropriate tools for many types of medical conditions.

In addition to the mobile MRI unit, Interior Health has MRI units at Kelowna General Hospital and Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops. Permanent MRI machines have been approved for Penticton Regional Hospital and Vernon Jubilee Hospital, both of which are expected to become operational in 2019.