

Investments in imaging equipment help small Louisiana hospital make a big impact on its community

By Michael Walter

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West Feliciana Hospital (WFH) has been serving patients in the small town of St. Francisville, Louisiana, since 1970, but its imaging capabilities were limited for a long time. As a result, the hospital gained a bit of a reputation among referring physicians in the area—when in doubt, they would just avoid WFH altogether and send patients more than 30 miles away to Baton Rouge.

In the last year, however, this has all changed dramatically. And according to Dakisha B. Robertson, BSRS, RT (R) (ARRT), WFH's imaging department manager, that turnaround began with the purchase of two key pieces of imaging equipment from Hitachi: the Echelon Oval 1.5T MR system and SCENARIA 128 slice CT scanner.

Committing to the future

When WFH invested in new CT and MR equipment, it represented a momentous decision in the hospital's history. Its legacy 16-slice CT scanner was 8 years old and didn't give technologists the tools they needed to provide the best care possible, and there wasn't even an MR system on the premises; mobile equipment was brought in once a week to perform a handful of scans.

So how did this small hospital end up taking such a huge leap forward? Once they knew they wanted to make some changes to their imaging resources, the



hospital's management surveyed physicians from the area to see which services they thought WFH should cover. The results caught the hospital off guard.

"Physicians were adamant that we get MRI, which really did surprise us," Robertson says. "But they were sending their patients to Baton Rouge because we didn't have the equipment here. And we knew there wasn't enough volume to merit purchasing an MRI system, but the potential for growth was there."

With those results in hand, Robertson and her colleagues had a crucial decision to make: Do they remain at the status quo due to their low imaging volumes or do they go all in and commit to the future?

They chose the future. The hospital decided to invest in both a new CT scanner and a new MR system.

Bigger doesn't mean better

Representatives from several vendors travelled to St. Francisville to pitch their latest and greatest CT and MR solutions to a panel of WFH leaders that included Robertson, the hospital's CEO and its purchasing officer.

For the CT scanner, the team was focused on image quality and improved dose reporting. "We wanted it to be easier to track dose," Robertson says. "And we wanted to be able to provide better services without exposing patients to more radiation."

Training was also important to the hospital; after all, they were moving from a 16-slice CT to something much more advanced. This meant they would need the vendor to provide training when necessary and the equipment couldn't be too complicated.

For the MR system, one of Robertson's biggest priorities—in addition to a high image quality—was that that it include a wide enough bore. "We do live in Louisiana and almost everyone here loves their food, so we wanted to be able to accommodate our patients," she says.

Once the vendors made their pitches and bids started to come in, Hitachi quickly won over WFH's decision makers. The equipment was right, the features were right, the people were right—and, yes, the price was right as well.

Choosing Hitachi did result in some pushback at first from radiologists who read for the hospital, Robertson notes. They preferred the "bigger," more traditional vendors.

"The radiologists we work with didn't want to hear about other vendors" Robertson says. "But as soon as we evaluated Hitachi's offerings relative to our needs and the needs of our community, they were sold."

In a way, Robertson adds, she felt a certain bond with Hitachi. She knows smaller facilities such as WFH don't always get as much respect as larger hospitals. But bigger doesn't always mean better.

With the help of Hitachi's equipment and services, WFH is now able to provide the same level of service as the larger hospital systems with the same level of quality, or even better, and that is phenomenal."

Providing better care

It's been a few months now since Hitachi's equipment was installed at WFH and Robertson says it's incredible how much of an impact the new equipment has had on their hospital. CT and MRI volume are both way up and referrals are flying in from all over. Referring physicians, including neurologists and other specialists who had never worked with WFH, now send referrals their way because they love the new CT and MR images.

"Physicians are now trusting us to provide these services when, in the past, they didn't," Robertson says. "It makes you feel good. It makes you want to work even harder."

Those radiologists who were initially familiar and comfortable with other vendors have even been converted. One of them reached out to both Robertson and WFH's CEO to say how impressed they were with the image quality from the new machines.

The hospital's technologists are thrilled as well. Though they were unsure about learning the new CT scanner at first, Robertson says, Hitachi was able to quickly get them up to speed. And guidance from Hitachi's representatives has helped WFH make huge improvements to its radiation dose reporting.

"The dose reporting makes our technologists better at their job, because they are more cautious and they're more conscious of the protocols that they use, making sure they give patients the lowest dose," Robertson says. "Hitachi was very instrumental in saying,

‘this is what you can do, this is what other hospitals are doing, you need to work towards these goals.’”

Impacting the entire community

Radiologists, technologists, referring physicians and hospital leadership are all happy with the decision to go with Hitachi—but the equipment’s impact goes much further than that. Area residents are now getting better value-based care than ever before, and patients who were going to Baton Rouge for exams in the past are now staying put. This means more St. Francisville dollars are being spent in St. Francisville.

“Choosing Hitachi has been very good for us, because there is a stigma about smaller hospitals not having the same quality equipment as larger systems,” Robertson says. “Hitachi has given us the opportunity to provide better service to this community.”

Looking ahead, Robertson isn’t sure what other changes WFH may make to its imaging department in the future. But when the time comes, she knows Hitachi will be the hospital’s first choice. “We’d definitely look to Hitachi first,” she says. “And I would definitely recommend other hospitals looking for a partner to help grow services and offer their community a broader range of clinical capabilities, look at them. Hitachi helps you grow.”