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CMC opens first prison-based breast imaging center in nation

By *Kristen Hensley*

OCT. 24, 2007--UTMB has taken a major step forward in female correctional health care. On Oct. 1, the Gatesville Unit, located in Coryell County, became the first correctional facility in the nation to have an on-site breast imaging center.

UTMB's Correctional Managed Care division chose the Gatesville Unit because of its close proximity to six other all-female correctional facilities. The new breast imaging center will utilize the latest in digital mammography equipment to help promote early detection for its female population.



“The American Cancer Society estimates that almost 180,000 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, and because we have a significant number of female offenders, we have an ethical and moral responsibility to provide opportunities for early detection,” said Bryan Schneider, director of clinical support services for UTMB CMC.

Providing a means for early detection also makes sense from a financial standpoint, says Schneider. “We need to manage taxpayer dollars responsibly. And if we are able to detect breast cancer early enough, then there is less expenditure on medications and treatments than when it’s found in later stages.”

Previously, UTMB CMC contracted with an independent mobile mammography provider but, according to Schneider, there were continuous challenges. “It was difficult to coordinate having a van come once or twice a month with such a large female population. Scheduling each offender in a timely manner was a struggle,” he said.

Bonnie Brandon could attest to that. She’s been at the facility for 16 years and is the new manager of the breast imaging center. Now that the Gatesville Unit has the best mammography equipment available, she feels they have more control over their compliance and quality of care. “I expect this to be a standard-setting operation here, so we are doing our very best to set the standards high,” she said.

In addition to state-of-the-art equipment, Brandon went a little further and completely decorated the breast imaging room herself, from laying the ceramic tile to painting the exam room. “Bonnie took a very grim and sterile environment and transformed it,” Schneider said. “She did a great job of putting it all together.”

“I don’t think there’s a nicer mammography suite anywhere in the free world,” said Brandon, proudly. “I really wanted to make the surroundings pleasant. Anything I can do to put our female offenders at ease provides a safer environment that benefits us all.”

UTMB CMC provides health care for offenders in more than 100 correctional facilities through most of Texas. According to Schneider, CMC does it better than anyone in the nation. “We believe we are the tip of the spear when it comes to addressing health care issues within a correctional environment,” Schneider said. “I’m really proud of what we’re accomplishing.”

A division of UTMB’s Community Health Services, CMC offers medical, dental and mental health services to more than 126,000 patients or about 80 percent of the state’s inmate population. According to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the total female offender population is just over 12,000.

About Impact

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