

Communications Department

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Health Minister Unveils New Digital Breast Unit

The Royal United Hospital Bath is one of the first in the South West to offer an entirely digital mammography service to breast cancer patients. Today (Monday 20th April 2009) Ben Bradshaw, Minister of State for Health Services and Minister for the South West, will officially open it.

The unit sees approximately 3,500 new referrals each year, and of these, about 350 patients will have breast cancer. The unit also runs a high Risk screening programme for those with a strong family history of breast cancer or who have had chest radiotherapy as treatment for Hodgkin's disease at a young age. The high risk group tends to be younger women who benefit especially from the digital mammography.

Lead Consultant in Diagnostic Breast Imaging at the hospital, Dr Dorothy Goddard says, "We now have access to state of the art digital mammography and very sophisticated breast ultrasound scanners. These allow clearer, more accurate images - helping us to detect cancers at an even earlier stage and giving us more information to guide treatment."

Minister of State for Health Services and Minister for the South West, Ben Bradshaw said, "I am delighted to be at The Royal United Hospital today to formally open the new breast cancer unit. It is one of the first hospitals in the South West to offer an 'all digital' mammography service to its patients which allows clearer, more accurate images.

"The NHS Breast Screening Programme is a great success, regarded as one of the best cancer screening services in the world and saving an estimated 1,400 lives each year. We are confident that the roll out of digital mammography across the NHS Breast Screening Programme will bring a number of benefits and further improve the service provided to women."

In December 2007, the Cancer Reform Strategy highlighted the benefits of digital mammography services and set out that the NHS should ensure all breast screening units have access to digital mammography screening by 2010. The Unit at the RUH means that the service has been made available to women in Bath, North East Somerset and Wiltshire, ahead of the nationally set recommendation.

Sandra Veasey from Bitton near Bath is a patient at the Unit. The digital scanning was able to pinpoint Sandra's cancer. She says, "After I was diagnosed, I dreaded walking into the Unit, starting treatment. However everyone there made me feel so at ease, particularly my breast care nurse. I used to feel physically sick and my heart absolutely pounded when I had to go, but it is a wonderful place and my treatment could not have been better."

The Minister will also tour the Radiology MRI/CT Unit and the Emergency Department at the RUH before officially unveiling the plaque at the Breast Unit and meeting patients who have benefited from the new technology.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

With the old machinery, film was used to take pictures via the mammogram – now the results are instantly available for doctors to access, via a computer terminal. This not only saves time but also allows the image to be manipulated so it improves the radiologist's ability to interpret breast tissue.

Direct digital mammography has been shown to be more sensitive and specific for pre-menopausal women who have denser breasts.

The media are invited to the Breast Unit at **3:15pm**.

The Minister will be available for Media Opportunity at **3:30pm** after the official opening of the unit. Two former patients of the Breast Unit, including Sandra Veasey, have kindly agreed to be present and be interviewed.

To confirm your attendance, please contact a member of the Communications Team on 01225 825799/826230.

Mirage Signs, based in Warminster, have kindly donated a commemorative plaque, to be unveiled at the opening on the 20th.