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phy equipment isn't receiving the volume of patients to justify the investment in terms of simple dollars and cents.

"We probably would have ended up with a mobile unit in the not too distant future," Tracy said, "but because of the Dakota Hospital Foundation, we've ended up with a fixed one, because they saw a need for it."

The hospital foundation, he said, reviewed the breast cancer mortality and morbidity rates in Clay County and compared them to nearby counties, the state, and the nation.

"For whatever reason, the mortality rates were higher in Clay County than they were in the surrounding areas," Tracy said. "In some cases, it's very significant when compared to neighboring counties. So the foundation board saw a need, and they said, 'we've got to do this.'"

The Dakota Hospital Foundation purchased the digital mammography machine, launching a capital campaign to pay for the more sophisticated technology. Sanford Vermillion also continues its commitment to meet all of the healthcare needs of people in the region, including offering uncompensated care to some patients based on their financial circumstances.

"We have committed to performing 50 mammographies in the course of the next year at no cost to the patients if they qualify," Tracy said. "And, when we talked about this, and were discussing the needs of our patients, we noted that there



Dawn Swanson and Cindy Leber, radiological technologists at Sanford Vermillion Hospital, are pictured with the hospital's digital mammography equipment. The modern technology has been in operation in Vermillion since May. (Photo by David Lias)

is a digital mammography unit in Sioux Falls, there is one in Yankton, and one in Sioux City, so to be able to access that current, cutting-edge technology, someone would have to travel at a minimum to Yankton, and if they didn't visit a doctor there, they would have to go

to Sioux Falls or Sioux City. "If you think about it in terms of our poverty income levels here, which are higher than most counties, then you start thinking about gas prices, and whether everyone does have access, even if it only 30 miles away," he said. "The answer is no, and

if we don't have a means of qualifying the patients to get a mammography without some financial disadvantages, we will have people who will just go without. What ends up happening is they start developing some symptoms, and that's why they eventually come in. By that time, it's really too late. The screening is what we're looking for, and digital does a much better job of screening, in my lay opinion."

"The biggest advantage of digital mammography is the amount of detail that we are able to capture in each image," said Randy Jarvis, radiology manager at Sanford Vermillion. "We are using such high resolution monitors, and the radiologists are able to manipulate the images using computer software - we are able to see much more detail than we could with just plain film."

A woman undergoing a mammography won't notice much difference in the procedure with the new equipment compared to the analog mammography device that used to be in place at Sanford Vermillion. "But the image capture function with the new digital equipment is way ahead of the film capture," Jarvis said.

After a woman receives a digital mammography exam at Sanford Vermillion, the images are digitally transmitted to a radiologist in Sioux Falls. The Sioux Falls specialist then makes a report which is sent back to the woman's local physician.

"It isn't any faster to have a radiologist in-house than it is to have them in Sioux

Falls," Tracy said, "because with electronics, we no longer have to mail films, or have them taken to specialists by courier, and then have their reports returned to us by courier. By the time we get done now, we've taken what used to be week-long process and narrowed it down to as little as 24 hours."

"We've taken a number of days off the process," Jarvis said.

"All of the images are stored electronically," Tracy added. "So if you want to look progressively at a woman's mammograms over a five year period, specialists can look at those, particularly if you see something that is suspicious."

"The standard is to compare new images with those from past tests," Jarvis said. "And since we're just getting started with digital mammograms, when we send our digital images up to Sioux Falls, we still have to send our old film images from previous years' exams for comparison. We haven't quite seen all of the advantages in speed that we will down the road. Going down the road, we will eventually be able to compare digital to digital."

"This may be a \$250,000

upgrade, with another \$100,000 upgrade to come fairly soon this year or early next year that will further enhance the service," Tracy said, "but it's been part of an over a \$1 million campaign with Sanford Vermillion upgrading our radiography suite to digital, putting in a new CT scanner, putting in a new ultrasound unit, and a new bone scan unit."

"We've spent well over \$1 million in upgrades over the past four years or so," he said. "That's a huge commitment to the community, because right now there's no way you can pay for the cost of the equipment with the number of exams we do in Vermillion. That's why we do it, and you don't see anyone else do it here. You could still buy a less expensive analog machine, but it's not what the public needs or wants or demands anymore."

In the scheme of breast cancer health for women in the Vermillion area, the new digital mammography serves a valuable role in early detection.

"The mammogram, the self-exam and the clinical breast exam - those make up the front line of early detection," Jarvis said.

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was told that normally you wait six months to have a mammogram because of all of the changes that your breasts undergo from nursing before getting back to their normal state," Eglund said. "I wasn't going to wait six months, because I knew that something wasn't right."

Facebook users may visit www.facebook.com/Yoplait-Pledge, and click the "I Pledge" button on the Pledge tab for Yoplait to donate money to breast cancer research. Donations will be made through Oct. 31.

Every time one takes the pledge on Facebook, Yoplait donates 10 cents towards Eglund's research, up to

\$100,000. "So Yoplait, instead of saying 'we sponsor breast cancer research,' is saying, 'we sponsor Dr. Kristi Eglund's breast cancer research,'" she said. "Yoplait selected my grant out of all grants nationally,

and they didn't know I was a breast cancer survivor."

During a teleconference involving Eglund and officials from Susan G. Komen for the Cure and Yoplait, the company learned that the Sioux Falls researcher is a

breast cancer survivor.

"The Yoplait people asked me to tell them what my breast cancer research means to me," she said. "They wanted to know why I am motivated to do this."

Eglund replied that she is a breast cancer survivor.

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