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Grand Itasca helps fight heart disease with advanced diagnostic capabilities

Grand Rapids – This summer, Grand Itasca Clinic and Hospital became one of the first health care providers in Northern Minnesota to offer two state-of-the-art procedures that are improving the diagnosis of coronary artery disease across the country.

“Both CT calcium scoring and the cardiac CT angiogram scan have proven to a wide array of researchers and cardiologists that it is possible to use imaging technology to screen for heart attack risk,” said Dr. Tim Pehl, chief medical officer at Grand Itasca. “These are phenomenal advances, and we’re excited to be able to offer them locally.”

Calcium scoring is a non-invasive test that uses x-rays and computer technology to generate images of calcium content in the coronary arteries. A high level of calcium content can indicate evidence of heart disease, which occurs when the arteries that carry blood and oxygen to the heart become clogged with plaque.

“If plaque build-up can be detected before permanent damage occurs, there are many more options for medications and/or lifestyle changes that can help stabilize – and sometimes reduce – it,” said Dr. Peter Friedlieb, an internal medicine physician at Grand Itasca. “For the patient, that reduces the risk of a heart attack.”

Calcium scoring is a short and simple imaging test and requires no fasting, injections or contrast agents.

The cardiac angiogram scan also uses x-rays and computer technology to produce images of the heart. In this case, the procedure results in detailed renderings of the arteries as well as any plaque build-up within them. Such images enable radiologists and cardiologists to carefully assess heart attack risk and make appropriate recommendations. The non-invasive test does require an injection of a contrast material to help define the arteries.

“It’s a very simple procedure, and in selected patients with chest pain, it’s a highly effective way for us to quickly determine whether or not he or she is suffering from narrowing of the coronary arteries,” said Grand Itasca Radiologist Dr. Steve Haugen. “It helps us determine the best course of action.”

Both calcium scoring and the cardiac angiogram scan use software bundles to capitalize on the presence of the 64-slice, computed tomography (CT) scanner at Grand Itasca. In Northern Minnesota, Grand Itasca is one of just a few health care facilities with on-site access to a 64-slice scanner. The technology was acquired after clinic and hospital leaders consulted with cardiology

experts at Abbott Northwestern in Minneapolis regarding critical technologies. Abbott recommended the 64-slice scanner, and since then, Dr. Jon Lesser, who is internationally recognized for his expertise in cardiac imaging, has worked closely with staff and physicians at Grand Itasca to advance cardiac imaging capabilities.

”We’ve been working closely with Abbott and Dr. Lesser to provide the most effective cardiac diagnostic program that we possibly can,” said Dr. Haugen. “Whether the patient will be treated by Grand Itasca staff, visiting cardiologists, or physicians at other facilities, these new tests provide immediate and critical data. They not only enable us to get to the root of the problem, but they help us establish a sound direction for treatment.”

Currently, calcium scoring and the cardiac angiogram scan are available only on order from a physician. If you think you might be a candidate for testing, please discuss your individual history and risk factors with your health care provider.

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