OMC scan detecting it all

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SENECA — The volume of patients at Oconee Medical Center (OMC) continues to rise, with a combination of improvements including new equipment as a contributing factor.

In conjunction with the new patient tower opening earlier this year, OMC has announced its newest addition to the hospital team.The Computerized Axial Tomography (CAT) scan isn't a rare sight in hospitals across the nation, but the current prototype housed at OMC is.

The new CAT scan was brought on board in July, and since its inception, diagnostics at the hospital have skyrocketed. While the older model CAT scan is still used at the hospital, the new CAT scan is creating a more efficient way to keep patients healthy.

Many hospitals use — including other local health institutions — a four-slice (or image) scan. The new CAT scan at OMC more than quadruples that total. With each scan, radiologists are able to work with a total of 32 images, or slices.

"We can reconstruct images with a much higher volume of information," said John Uvall, radiologist at OMC. "This scan has been a wonderful thing for our patients. Now, with better imaging, we could catch something that we might have missed before."

And with the improved software to read through the scans, radiologists have been able to prepare the imaging much faster than before.

"What used to take days to do, as far as putting the information together for doctors to observe, now takes hours, if not less," said Bob Kennedy, radiologist. "The diagnostic power of this scan is amazing. Just amazing."

And the excitement abou the equipment isn't being celebrated by just the representatives at the hospital. For those needing a CAT scan, the comfort level of the procedure has changed immensely.

"You're not only able to take many more pictures, but the time is takes to do the scan is greatly improved," said Uvall. "Instead of having to hold your breath for 10 or more seconds, now a patient only has to hold their breath for a second or two. For patients who have trouble breathing or are apt to shortness of breath, that's a big deal."

And when a patient is able to stay completely still, the images are much more clear, leading to improved percentages of accurate diagnostics.

"Things like aneurysms, vascular imaging and pulmonary embolisms, this scan is making it much easier to catch these issues right away," Uvall said. "Very small masses, two millimeters for example, can be seen and therefore treated."

And for trauma patients, crucial minutes are not taken away, but given back as the new CAT scan can save nearly 30 minutes when determining where the problem areas lie, especially if someone is unconscious.

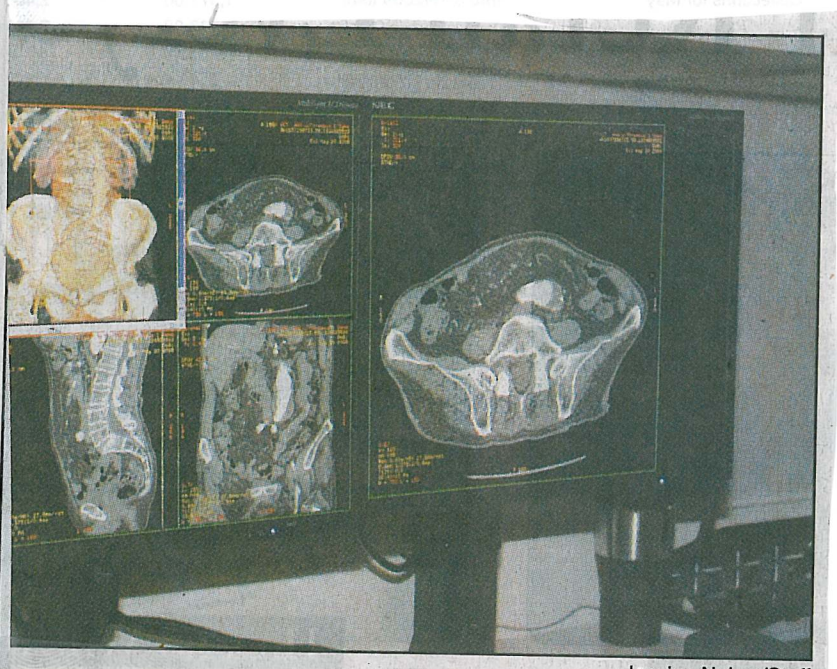
"When reconstructing images for the spine, neck and head, this scan is saving time," Uvall added. "Those minutes could mean everything to a patient in critical condition."

The new prototype of scan came out nearly two years ago in specific hospitals, but OMC is still enjoying the efficiency of the better equipment.

"Both CAT and MRI scans are used very often," Uvall said. "From fractures to neurological problems, they are the workhorse of getting these patients back to their best. Now, we are able to complete more scans and get the information much faster. It's a great thing all around."

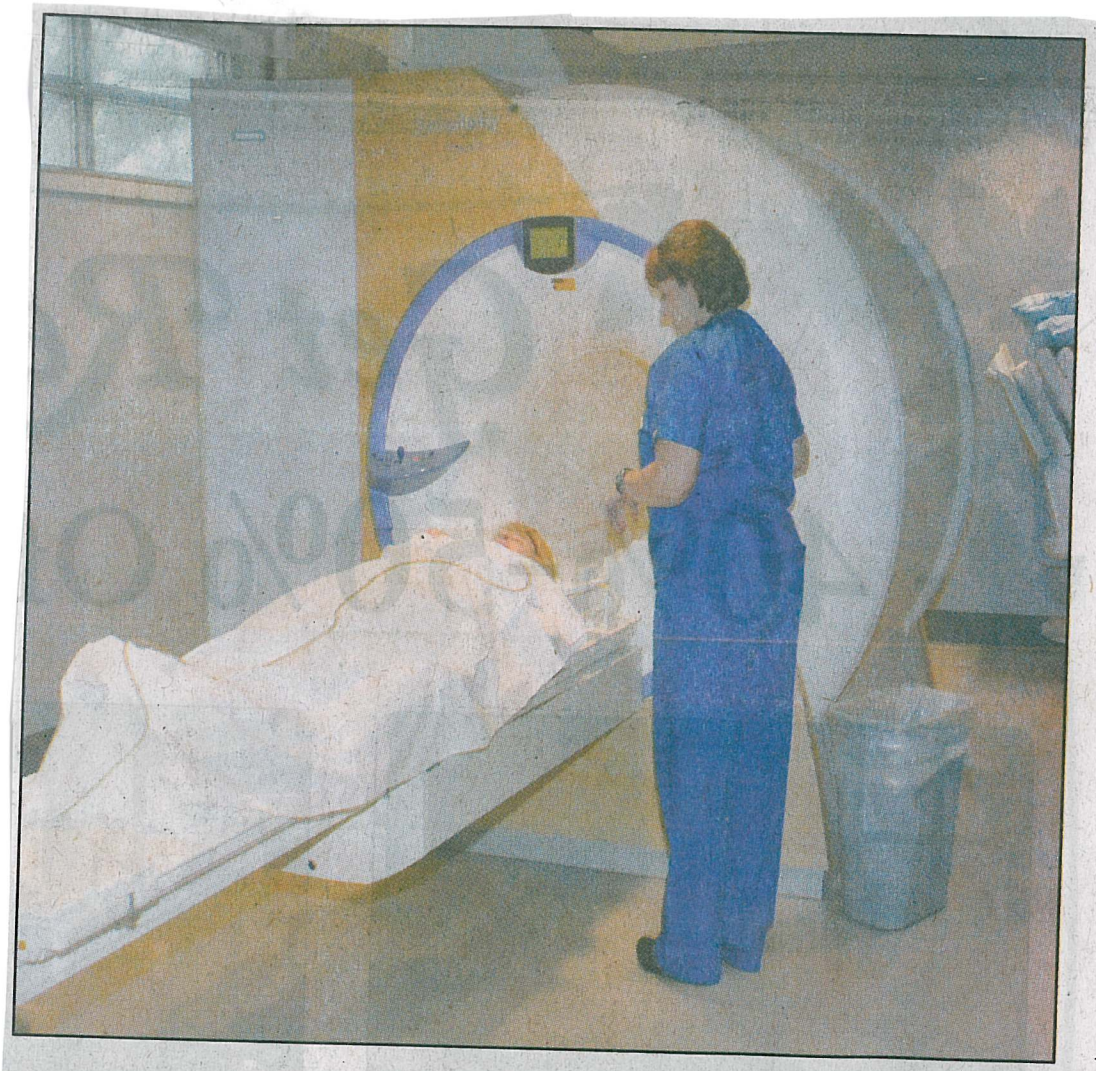
Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans at OMC help with soft tissue diagnosis, while CAT scans are better equipped to deal with bone problems and bleeding, especially in the brain.

"When people come in complaining of headaches, chest pain, abdominal pain or other signs, we are going to send them to get a CT scan," Uvall added. "It comes down to efficiency, and this is making quite the difference."



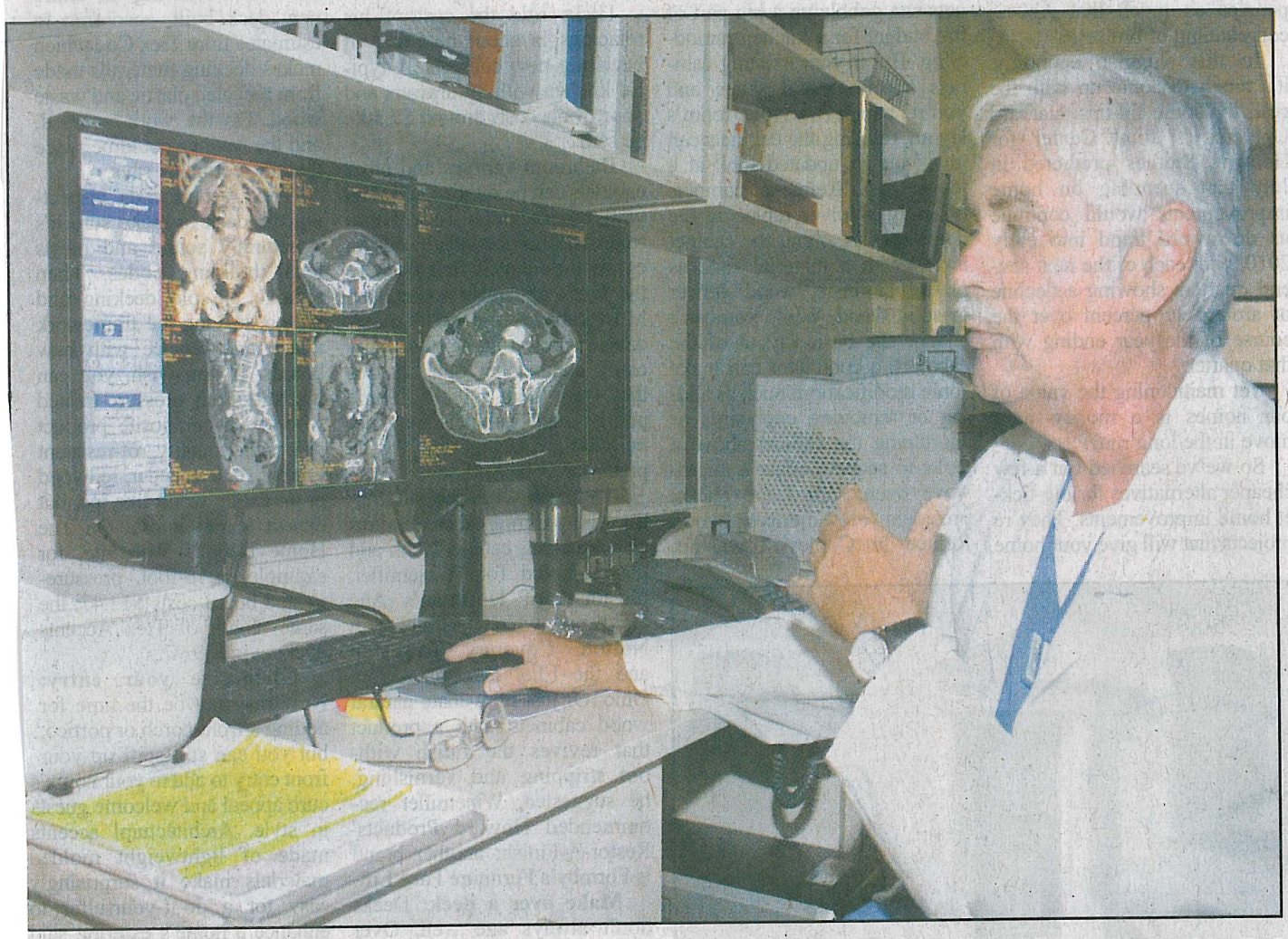
Jessica Nelms/Staff

Wednesday, September 23, 2009
Daily Journal • Daily Messenger



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The magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan at Oconee Medical Center works hand in hand with the new CAT scan. Although an MRI usually won't be used to detect problems with bone, both scans aid in diagnostics each day. With the new CAT scan technology and software, what used to take days to do can now be completed in mere hours, said Bob Kennedy.



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ob Kennedy, radiologist at Oconee Medical Center, analyzes a recently completed CAT scan.