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by Elaine Williams
Page 1 of 1

St. Joseph Regional Medical Center provides more ways to help when your brain hurts

Expanding treatment for neurology and cardiology patients has turned out to be one of the biggest priorities for RCCH HealthCare Partners as it maps its strategy at St. Joseph Regional Medical Center in Lewiston.

RCCH HealthCare Partners acquired St. Joe's in the spring, and in November announced some of its first major initiatives.

The hospital re-instituted around-the-clock neurosurgery care in November after agreeing to pay neurosurgeons Dr. Donald Soloniuk and Dr. William Hill more for the expanded hours.

The hospital also is interviewing a third neurologist as part of the solution to an 18-month problem in which neurosurgery typically was available during about half of any given month, said Blain Claypool, who has been St. Joe's CEO for two months.

Patients who needed neurosurgery at other times had to be flown or driven to Spokane.

Another significant upgrade is scheduled to be ready in the first part of 2018. It's a third cardiology and neurology catheterization laboratory with a biplane camera expected to cost \$2.5 million to \$3 million. Unlike St. Joe's first two catheterization laboratories, which have one camera, the new one will have two, that is able to capture almost a 3-D image.

The catheterization laboratories are where patients are treated for heart attacks and strokes. Interventional cardiologists perform balloon angioplasty, where they suction away clots that close arteries, then place stents — which are similar to small, tubular scaffolds — to keep the arteries open. The implant is done through a catheter that is inserted in the groin or arm.

Heart attacks happen when thin membranes surrounding plaque tear, creating clots. Placing a stent within 90 minutes of a patient arriving in the emergency room is considered the best treatment in most cases.

For stroke patients, one of St. Joe's specialists can insert a tiny wire into the brain and find a clot that has caused a stroke and break it up. Eventually, St. Joe's may retrofit its oldest catheterization laboratory for electrophysiology cardiology, a specialty one of its physicians is already trained in.

The physician can map electro impulses in the heart, identify ones that are misfiring and correct the problem in a treatment that is sometimes used in conjunction with or instead of a pacemaker.

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