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Mt. Carmel receives STATPack

BY SCOTT SIMS | THE MORNING SUN

Mt. Carmel Regional Medical Center has a new tool to help identify potential bioterrorism materials.

The Secure Telecommunications Application Terminal Package (STATPack) allows staff to send photos or live video of samples to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE).

A digital Web cam mounted on a sealed Plexiglas box and camera attached to a microscope send the images directly to the KDHE laboratories.

Prior to having the STATPack, if a sample Mt. Carmel had needed to be examined by the KDHE lab, it had to be sent physically. Now, with STATPack, samples can be viewed in real time by KDHE, reducing the time for diagnosis.

"Now, assistance is available in real time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, via beeper and laptop computer, to analyze samples sent from STATPack locations," said Delores Wishart, Laboratory Director at Mt. Carmel, in a press release.

Mt. Carmel microbiologist Shirley Cunningham said they can diagnosis most samples the lab receives locally.

"But if we do need to send something out, this device can help," Cunningham said. "If we were to get something that we could not rule out as Anthrax here, for example, then we can send a picture of it to the state lab. We have never had an Anthrax strain here, but that is an advantage."

Mt. Carmel Regional Medical Center is one of the first in Kansas to have the STATPack. Eventually, nine hospital labs across Kansas will have the STATPack.

"Everything revolves around the state lab," Cunningham said. "If there ever was a bioterrorism outbreak, having the STATPack at Mt. Carmel would help us to provide information to the state more quickly and also allow other area hospitals to bring samples to us so we could send them to the state. This could potentially speed up the process of diagnosing and help to contain an outbreak in an emergency situation."

The STATPack was designed to be used in a bioterrorism outbreak, but Cunningham said there are other uses for the equipment.

"We can use it for educational purposes," she said. "If we do isolate an unusual organism here, we can take a picture of it and use

it for training purposes."

Cunningham also hopes in the future to use STATPack to begin sending pictures of fungus that the lab finds to its reference lab.

"We do not, and never had tried to identify fungus here," she said. "There are a lot of fungus that is not pathogenic [causes or capable of causing disease]. If we could use this to rule out those that are non-pathogens, it would save time and money."

STATPack was purchased through grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services division Health Resources and Services Administration.

"We are quite fortunate to be one of the few labs in the state to receive this equipment through grant funding," Wishart said in the release. "The system gives us instant access to experts and by sending pictures and not the samples themselves, STATPack also reduces the risk of spreading potentially dangerous materials through the additional handling."

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