

New equipment yields fast answers for CCH

By Eric Freeman efreeman@columbustelegram.com Thursday, Feb 07, 2008 - 12:35:03 pm CST

COLUMBUS -- Laboratory technicians at Columbus Community Hospital have an added weapon in their arsenal of diagnostic equipment.

The Secure Telecommunications Application Terminal Package system (STaTPack) enables Columbus Community Hospital and other labs across the state to send digital images of suspicious or unknown organisms electronically to the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory for consultation.

"This new equipment will allow us to get almost instant feedback on any sample we would suspect as being related to a bioterrorism threat," said Janet Eisenmenger, lab technician at CCH. "In this type of scenario, as soon as the material is sent, the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory would evaluate it and inform us of the next steps to take."

Eisenmenger said the equipment's built in alert systems offer constant and instant availability to the expertise of the public health lab, which would include diagnostic quality images and textual information if a bioterrorism alert is issued by that organization or Homeland Security.

The STaTPack project was developed through a cooperative effort of information technology experts at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, the Peter Kiewit Institute, health care professionals at the University Nebraska Medical Center and the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory.

"The funding for all this came as a direct result of the 911 attacks," said Elizabeth Alexander, laboratory director at the hospital. "The state public health lab received a grant to develop procedures to identify agents that had potential for use in bioterrorism. STaTPack is the answer to that directive."

The two most important features of the system are it's ability to save diagnostic time and eliminate the risks associated with the hand-delivery of potential bioterroristic materials. Twenty STaTPack systems have been installed across Nebraska.

"It's really all about better patient care," said Alexander. "This equipment is going to allow us to take an image of any cultured bacterial material, send it to Omaha and get almost instant feed back. This can result in a faster, more accurate diagnosis and in some cases less cost to the patient."

Alexander said the typical bacterial samples are cultured with results returned in 18-24 hours. With few exceptions, the types of biological material that could potentially be used for bioterrorism take up to 48 hours to identify.

"This is another big clue that we may have something that needs to be looked at," Alexander said. "If we're not getting a clear result in that 18-24 hour time frame, we're going to be sending images of that culture for to the health lab for a consultation."

Eisenmenger said the STaTPack is a great addition to the lab for other reasons as well.

"This is a great new addition to our lab," she said. "Other uses for this equipment include education of new lab techs and medical tech students. Using this equipment will also enable us to create an image album of bacteria samples that we might not see on a regular basis."

Eisenmenger said all the technicians at the hospital will be trained to handle any alerts received by the state's public health lab. Seven of the 16 medical lab technicians at the hospital's lab will also be trained to send information to the state lab using the new STaTPack equipment.

The STaTPack system is also installed in Norfolk, Grand Island, Scottsbluff, Kearney, Fremont, and O'Neill as well as facilities across Kansas and Oklahoma.

Clifton P. Juarez

Feb 7, 2008 3:16 PM

Isn't this great? More citizens should consider donations to the hospital and the public library. Health and reading are not the provinces of government. We can go it alone if we all chip in!

are you kidding me

Feb 8, 2008 9:21 AM

Clifton, I think the hospital is well adapt at overcharging for their services already. MRI at hospital to the north of us, just under \$1000 CCH \$3200 I highly doubt they need my money.



Columbus Community Hospital Lab Technician Janet Eisenmenger is pictured with the STaTPack equipment. The image on her monitor is taken from the camera in the glass box to her right. Digital images can be sent directly to the Nebraska Public Health Laboratories for consultation, and the lab can, in turn, send health or bioterrorism alerts instantly through the system to participating labs across the state. Telegram photo by Eric Freeman

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