

TO MEDIA

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Photo: Independence Health System thoracic surgeons Michael Szwerc (left) and Brian Lace (far right) with Kirby Thornton, Respiratory Care Services, and Erin Wilson, Perioperative Services at Latrobe Hospital where a new portable C-arm allows for real time CT images during lung procedures.

**INDEPENDENCE HEALTH SYSTEM FIRST IN REGION TO DEPLOY
MOBILE CT TECHNOLOGY TO BOOST ROBOTIC CAPABILITIES**

***Thoracic Surgeons Aided In Discovery, Treatment of Lung Diseases
With Addition Of Mobile Imaging To Support Robot-Assisted Care***

GREENSBURG, PA, July 5, 2023 ...Independence Health System continues to diagnose and treat lung cancer sooner thanks to the addition of a mobile imaging device that provides real-time computed tomography (CT) scans during minimally invasive procedures. Thoracic surgeons Michael Szwerc, MD, FACS, and Brian Lace, MD, are the first in southwestern Pennsylvania to use this new technology in their practice at the Surgical Institute at Latrobe Hospital, where they recently conducted several cases with the new Siemens Cone Beam 3D CT scanner. The technology adds real time image feedback for precise visualization of nodules.

Purchase of the device was made possible by a \$500,000 grant from the

Allegheny Foundation with assistance from the Latrobe Area Hospital Charitable Foundation and the Westmoreland Hospital Foundation.

Typically, patients would need to be moved from the procedure room to the imaging department where a stationary CT is housed, causing a delay in information gathering that would aid the surgeons in evaluating and diagnosing lung disease. The portability of this new scanner means it can be rolled into place with no interference to the surgical robot or the surgical team and lead to more timely patient care.

Robot-assisted surgery is the norm at Independence Health System and Latrobe Hospital, where Dr. Szwerc recently surpassed 1,500 cases, nearly half of which are lung resections.

“The primary purpose of a lung cancer screening program is to reduce the mortality of lung cancer by identifying it at its earliest stage. Lung cancer begins as a small nodule or ‘growth’ in the lung, which can only be identified by a CT scan,” noted Dr. Szwerc in describing the significance of this investment.

When a nodule is found, the multidisciplinary team is tasked with deciding how best to manage the abnormality. Options include surgical removal or CT guided tissue removal using a robot-assisted bronchoscopic biopsy platform such as MONARCH, which is already in place at Latrobe Hospital. MONARCH relies on virtual CT images that are loaded into the planning computer software. Although this technology is very good, it can produce a false negative rate of up to 20 percent. Patients with COPD or obesity may also increase the challenges of successful diagnosis without the real-time portable CT.

From January 2016 through June of 2022, the Advanced Lung Center, where Dr. Szwerc is medical director, performed nearly 15,000 low-dose CT scans for the detection of lung cancer. Of the 5,500 patients scanned, nearly 200 new cases of lung cancer were discovered for a detection rate of 3.5 percent. For patients receiving bronchoscopies, Dr. Szwerc believes the additional of the mobile CT will improve patient outcomes by finding anomalies more quickly when treatment has the highest rate of success. Across the industry, clinical trials are underway that support the use of robotic bronchoscopy with real time CT imaging to ablate small lung cancers during the same procedure.

Already proving its value to the thoracic surgeons, this cone beam CT scanning also can be utilized by orthopedic and neurosurgeons for orthopedic trauma and spine procedures.

Nationally recognized for quality care, Independence Health System comprises Butler Memorial, Clarion, Frick, Latrobe and Westmoreland Hospitals with a combined bed count of 925. With more than 1,000 physicians and advanced practice providers and 7,300 employees, the System is now the third largest in western Pennsylvania serving a population base of 750,000 in a footprint spanning more than 10 counties.

The System includes tertiary programs that are rated among America's best for cardiac care and surgery by Healthgrades in its Top 100 and Top 50 designations, and one of only five in Pennsylvania to achieve a five-star rating in cardiac surgery. In similar fashion, the prestigious Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) bestowed its top three-star rating. Historically, less than 10 percent of programs within the STS data base achieve this elite standing. The hospitals of Independence Health System also have earned a host of accolades from such prestigious outlets and sources as US News and World Report, Newsweek Magazine, the American College of Radiology, the American College of Cardiology, the American College of Surgeons, the Joint Commission, Leapfrog and the American Heart/Stroke Association.

Locally owned and locally controlled, Independence Health System offers its patients low-cost, high-quality care across the care spectrum in such specialties as cardiology, cardiovascular and thoracic surgery, orthopedics and sports medicine, minimally invasive and robotic surgery, women's health and obstetrics, emergency medicine, behavioral health and primary care. Its network of outpatient centers sees more than 1.2 million visits annually. The homecare division further supports patients at all stages of life with home health and hospice services.

Independence Health System continues to change the healthcare landscape in western Pennsylvania by meeting patient needs through superb physician expertise, outstanding nursing, the latest in technology and programmatic depth.