

# Heart checks done locally

**By Steve Tool**  
**Wallowa County Chieftain**

Wallowa County citizens who have heart issues or wish to check if they have heart issues don't necessarily have to leave the area to get a diagnosis. Wallowa Memorial Hospital has equipment capable of diagnosing a number of heart ailments.

Sarah Johnson, WMH imaging director, invites potential patients to come and see what the hospital offers.

The hospital offers a resting echocardiogram and vascular work through their ultrasound apparatus as well as OB/GYN and abdominal work. "We cover a lot of territory," Johnson said.

With the resting echocardiogram, the patient lays on her side while a technician takes video clips of the heart at work. A cardiologist reads the clips and can make diagnoses of anything from a heart attack, heart valve problems and congenital heart conditions. The cardiologist can also check on patients with heart valve replacements.

The machine also has a color Doppler which colors the clips and pictures and even makes it possible to see blood flowing through the heart. "It picks up on the motion of blood flow. Whether you're doing a vascular exam, such as carotid arteries, or in your legs, we can look at color and the blood flowing," Johnson said.

After Johnson made a presentation in 2013 to the Circle 100 Club, the imaging department received a gift of nearly \$15,000, which paid for a stress echocardiogram upgrade that the department put into use in November of 2014. Johnson said the upgrade has great prognostic value.

Patients run on a treadmill while the imaging team performs an echocardiogram to see how the heart reacts to physical stress, hence the name. The imaging team also runs tests both before and after the exercise for change monitoring. Aberrations in the test are sent to the catheterization lab for further observation.

Just the addition of the upgrade keeps the hospital from sending up to 200 patients a year to other facilities, thus saving them a long drive while keeping local patients local. The hospital has four doctors who also conduct the tests as a doctor's presence is required.

Technologist Rebecca Patton is a fairly recent addition to the imaging team. Patton was already trained and specialized in echocardiography. Johnson said the imaging team transition to the upgrade went very smoothly with no fuss.

For now, the upgrade is keeping the imaging team on their toes. "We're staying really busy here, especially with these stress echoes. It's good for the patients and good for the bottom line," Johnson said.

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