

PRESS RELEASE – 20 December, 2017

South Tyneside Hospital's super scanner now in use



South Tyneside District Hospital's new MRI scanner - the first of its kind in the UK – is now up and running and patients are benefiting from some of the most sophisticated technology in the world.

By providing highly accurate digital images, it is enabling doctors to diagnose more diseases and conditions, from cancers to sports injuries, in more parts of the body, more quickly, thereby revolutionising treatment, care and experience for patients from South Tyneside and Sunderland.

The tunnel of the new scanner is shorter, wider and better lit, making it more suitable for claustrophobic patients who previously had to be referred to an off-site 'open' scanner. The wider tunnel is also more suitable for patients larger than those which the previous scanner could accommodate. The previous scanner had different pieces of equipment for scanning different parts of the body, sometimes requiring patients to be moved if multiple areas of the body are to be scanned. The new scanner incorporates more of these pieces of equipment together within the patient

table and, once the patient is on the scanner table, less movement is required when more than one body area is being scanned. This is particularly important for the comfort and care of patients who are very ill.

Dr Richard Cooper, Lead Consultant for Radiology at the hospital, said: “The new scanner is a fantastic asset in our drive to improve radiology services for local patients. It is much more efficient, the quality of the images is exceptional and results are now available much faster. It also has amazing potential: for example, by providing visualisation of tumours in more detail we should be able to treat more of them effectively at an earlier stage. We are also looking at how we can use the scanner in more fields, such as cardiology, in the future.”

Work on the installation of the new MRI machine, including removal of the previous one which had been in use since 2004, began in September this year but the service for patients was seamless due to the introduction on site of a temporary mobile scanning unit. One wall of the scanner room is devoted to a work called ‘Coal, Ships, Fish and Chips’, by famed South Shields artist Bob Olley, which captures the famous landmarks of the borough.

MRI Lead Miles Weston said: “We are delighted to have this fine example of Bob’s work on display. It is proving a real talking point and a good distraction for our patients who can sometimes find the environment in the scanner room a little stressful, particularly if they are claustrophobic. The general feedback we’re getting from patients about the new scanner is very positive; they say they feel comfortable and relaxed during the scanning procedure.”

The new £1.5m MRI scanner is the latest investment in the South Tyneside District Hospital site. In the past two years, the Trust has also opened Haven Court, a £9 million centre of excellence for integrated health and social care for older people and a new £1.4 million Surgical Centre, which is improving patient experience and access to surgical services. It also hopes to start work in 2018 on a new energy centre, which will signal a further investment of £5 million.

Dr Shaz Wahid, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's Medical Director, added: "We're very proud to be able to offer our patients this latest cutting edge technology and we are very excited about its potential. It demonstrates our commitment to major investment at South Tyneside District Hospital in line with our aim of providing local services of the highest quality for local people now and in the future, despite the unprecedented financial pressures facing the NHS."

MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) is the name given to an imaging technique which takes very detailed images of the inside of the body. It uses a powerful magnetic field and radio waves, together with an advanced computer system, to build up a series of images through the area under examination. Patients lie within the tunnel or 'bore' of the MRI scanner when being scanned.

The results of the scan can be used to help diagnose conditions, plan treatments and assess how effective previous treatment has been. The scanner can be used to examine almost any part of the body including:

- the brain and spinal cord
- muscles, bones and joints (musculoskeletal)
- heart and blood vessels
- internal organs, such as the liver, womb or prostate gland

ENDS

Photo caption: Left to right: MRI radiographer David Barlow, Lead Consultant for Radiology Dr Richard Cooper and MRI Lead Miles Weston and the new MRI scanner, with a work by artist Bob Olley providing the backdrop

Notes to editors

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust have been working together as part of a strategic alliance known as the South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group since March 2016. A joint executive management team has been in place since November 2016 and is working towards a shared vision to develop high quality healthcare services that will benefit local communities for many years to come. Detailed work is currently taking place through the 'Path to Excellence' programme (www.pathtoexcellence.org.uk) to discuss how both Trusts can work better together to improve quality of care and address the challenges and pressures facing the whole NHS.

