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Artwork draws patient praise



World-famous South Tyneside artist Bob Olley officially opened the new £1.5million MRI scanner service at South Tyneside District Hospital.

His colourful work 'Coal, Ships, Fish and Chips', which captures some of the borough's famous landmarks past and present, covers one wall of the scanner room, where it is proving a big hit with patients, providing a talking point and a welcome distraction.

South Shields-born Mr Olley, who still lives in the town and who is known for his humorous drawings and paintings of everyday life, has supplied art works to the hospital in the past, some of which brighten the walls in the Radiology department.

The new MRI scanner - the first of its kind in the UK – gives patients from South Tyneside and Sunderland access to 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 patients' treatment, care and experience for patients.

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 were to be scanned. The new scanner incorporates this equipment 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.

Mr Olley, who worked as a painter and decorator and as a miner before finding fame as an artist and sculptor, said: "I was very honoured to be invited to officially open the new scanner service. It is wonderful that our local hospital can offer such fantastic equipment.

"I have my original 'Coal, Ships, Fish and Chips' watercolour, which is 3ft by 2ft 6in, but it is a real thrill to see it displayed on such a big scale in the scanner room. As an artist, you want people to be able to see and appreciate your work and I'd like to think it helps to take people's minds off what they're there for and just lifts the spirits of those who see it."

Dr Richard Cooper, Lead Consultant for Radiology at the hospital, said: "We can't thank Bob enough for allowing us to decorate the scanner room, where our patients can now take advantage of revolutionary MRI technology, with one of his images. The new scanner is much more efficient, the quality of the images it provides is exceptional and it gives us the results 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 future.”

MRI Lead Miles Weston said: “Patients can sometimes find the environment in the scanner room a little stressful, particularly if they are claustrophobic. The feedback from patients about the new scanner is very positive. They say they feel comfortable and relaxed during the scanning procedure and Bob’s painting definitely contributes to the positive atmosphere.”

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 2017 but the service for patients was seamless due to the introduction on site of a temporary mobile scanning unit.

The new MRI scanner is the latest example of 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. Work will start in the coming months on a new energy centre, signalling a further investment of around £5 million.

Dr Shaz Wahid, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's Medical Director, added: “We are committed to major investment at South Tyneside District Hospital in line with our aim, through the South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group, of providing sustainable local services of the highest quality for local people now, and in the future.”

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

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Photo caption: Artist Bob Olley with Miles Weston, MRI Lead at South Tyneside District Hospital, foreground, and other members of staff

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