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## Lily Pad to implement new imaging technology

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A new system used by a nurse examiner program is supposed to be 4,500 percent more clear than traditional photography. Jennifer Maddox Parks, staff writer

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From left, Amanda Simmons, RN; Amanda West, coordinator; Keli Smurda, clinical coordinator; and Ruthie Breton, RN, are preparing for an upgrade in imaging equipment used at Lily Pad SANE Center Inc. at 320 W. 2nd Ave.

ALBANY — Since 2007, the Lily Pad has been delivering comprehensive services to victims and families impacted by crimes of sexual assault and child sexual and physical abuse.

Their ability to do so is about to get much easier.

In the coming weeks, the organization is set to implement new imaging technology that will show details that would otherwise be more difficult to find.

“It is supposed to be 4,500 percent better than traditional photography,” said Lily Pad Executive Director Karen Kemp. “It can photograph injuries not yet visible to the naked eye.”

The technology is a fifth-generation digital imaging system. When in operation, it will save nurses the trouble of using dye to find proof of injuries that a camera would usually not be able to record.

“This camera will do with filters what nurses had to do with dye,” Kemp said.

The new system will also allow images to be peer-reviewed for investigative purposes. Rather than printing them out, the photos can be e-mailed using an encrypted message.

“We will be able to contact forensic nurses and doctors throughout the country,” Kemp said. “It’s cost-effective and safe, and it will enhance the outcome and make our jobs easier and more efficient.

“With a system that is very fast and accurate, there is a great enhancement to what you can get.”

The level of secrecy attached to the system surpasses that of even government standards.

“It takes a crazy amount of time to break the code,” said Keli Smurda, clinical nurse coordinator for the sexual assault program.

The Lily Pad is not the kind of place a person would want to end up. But officials hope the new technology can help raise the comfort level of the center’s victims.

“It’s going to make it easier for nurses to provide more efficient exams, and it is going to lessen the time a victim is submitted to an exam,” said Smurda. “It will allow us to take one picture as opposed to three. Exams are uncomfortable in the first place.”

The new system makes things more comfortable for the victim in the respect that there is less positioning involved with trying to get the proper photograph, Smurda said.

“If we have the ability to (get images) without having the patient involved, that is one of the most helpful things,” she said. “It helps them take their mind off things.”

The system became a reality when the center’s clinical director ran into Phoebe Putney Health System CEO Joel Wernick, Kemp said.

“She shared with him the challenges we were having, and that our dream was to purchase this equipment,” Kemp said.

It was then that Phoebe opted to pay the bill for the system, which comes with a \$22,000 price tag — including the camera and the computer system to go along with it.

“Too often the victim is the forgotten part of the crime,” Wernick said in a statement. “In the case of rape, the accumulation of evidence is an essential but sometimes dehumanizing byproduct of the justice system. The donation of this cutting-edge technology is recognition of the need of the small group of committed sexual assault nurses and the victims they examine.

“We pray this community investment assists law enforcement officials in reducing these heinous crimes.”

The new equipment will also be portable, which means nurse examiners will be able to take it to the hospital in the event they find themselves dealing with serious injuries.

“The only thing they could do before was take a standard camera,” Kemp said. “We can take this into any emergency room.”

The Lily Pad has helped more than 2,100 primary and secondary victims, offering a safe haven for abused children and adult victims, providing long-term psychological treatment for victims and their families, as well as assisting in the investigation of abuse cases. All services are offered at no cost to the individuals seeking them.

The age range of those who have sought services stretch from one end of the spectrum to the other.

“We see victims from the cradle to the grave,” Kemp said.

Since 2008, the center has had a 100 percent prosecution success rate. Since opening its doors, the Lily Pad has provided more than 1,200 referrals for additional services and forensic interviews for more than 700 sexually and physically abused children.

“This equipment is going to be a key piece in arming the district attorney’s office with what they need,” Kemp said.

The center covers roughly 25 counties, a number which actually rises above 30 when one takes into account cases coming from outside Southwest Georgia.

“We’ve never turned a county away,” Kemp said.

Over the last two years, the Lily Pad has come a long way. The facility has gone from starting out with two employees to 10 full-time employees and 13 contractors. Officials with the center generally follow up with clients until two to three years after the fact.

“I feel really good about where we are,” Kemp said. “(The center) came from the tremendous need for this service. Our population is at greater risk, and it’s not inexpensive to run a sexual assault center.

“The support we have felt has been tremendous. Without the committed (people) and the community support, this would not be possible. We want (sexual assault victims) to come to a place where they feel secure.”

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