

Researchers, surgeon to get new scanners

By CHRIS OLERT

Staten Island is getting its second CAT scanner within the next week and a half and its third CAT scanner by the end of the year.

Dr. Joseph Mormino, a Concord neurosurgeon and head of Staten Island Computerized Scanning Center Inc., is scheduled to have a CAT scanner, which is a sophisticated X-ray unit especially useful in diagnosing brain disorders, in operation by the end of this week or early next week.

Located at 11 Ralph Pl., Concord, the diagnostic tool manufactured by Ohio Nuclear, of Solon, Ohio, will be one of the first of its kind operated on the East Coast.

Called "Delta Scan," the unit is low-cost (around \$100,000) and is one of the first compact models in Ohio Nuclear's 110 Series, according to John Neeson, manager of sales administration.

CAT is an acronym for computerized axial tomography and is superior to traditional X-ray units because of the clear images it provides for physicians attempting to diagnose problems in the brain, especially blood clots.

"It's a necessity for neurology," said Mormino during an interview in his office.

The Albany Medical College graduate said he has no plans to transfer his unit to a hospital, but added that "there's a need for one in every hospital on Staten Island."

CAT scanners have been the target of national cost-containment efforts of health planning groups like the Health Systems Agency and last year, debate over the applications of Staten Island Hospital and St. Vincent's Medical Center for a unit left deep wounds among hospital personnel and administrators, some of which have not healed.

"It's a thing that's needed and it will be opened to all referrals," said Mormino, who is an attending physician at all four of the borough's hospitals.

Last November, L.K.S. Associates, a private neurological group of three physicians and surgeons, opened its own CAT unit in an office at 1265 Clove Rd., Sunnyside.

By the fall, the Institute for Basic Research, Willowbrook, plans to install a CAT unit in its facility at 1050 Forest Hill Rd. The unit there will be operated in cooperation with St. Vincent's Medical Center and a hospital spokesman said last week administrators expect to resubmit an application to the Health Systems Agency indicating the joint effort.

Administrators from St. Vincent's and the institute are scheduled to meet this week to discuss plans for cooperation, and administrators from the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, Clifton, are exploring the possible use of the IBR-based scanner.

The institute's scanner has been financed by \$500,000 that State Sen. John J. Marchi had included in last year's state supplemental budget. That money was appropriated with the understanding that every physician and hospital on the Island would have access to scanning facilities.

CAT scanners have been one of the items identified by the federal government as a medical device whose growth demands watching. They are expensive, ranging in price from \$100,000 to \$775,000 depending on their use, and some federal officials believe CAT scanners are the type of device that can be shared by physicians and hospitals to avoid duplication and improve efficiency.

Unlike proposed hospital-based CAT scanners, privately owned and operated units are not affected by the Health Systems Agency review process.

The HSA is a federally funded advisory body, which exclusively makes recommendations and has no enforcement power.

It makes recommendations to the state Health Department for projects affected by federal funds, including Medicaid because half of that insurance system's bill is paid for with federal money.