

## Small-town values and big-city technology a winning combo

*Nuclear technology is as beneficial a part of our lives as onions. Greenpeace ... get over it.*

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Fred Bohn remembers a time when some of the Pine Island farmers would pay their bills in onions.

That's a far cry from where the department is today, says the nuclear medicine technologist at St. Anthony Community Hospital in Warwick.

Back in 1969 when Fred started, there was one X-ray machine and one automatic processor, which took five minutes to develop the film. There were two techs and about 15 patients a day.

Today, a staff of 30 serves about 110 patients daily using sophisticated equipment that ranges from a 16-slice CT scanner to Fred's favorite, the gamma camera that's central to nuclear medicine.

"Nuclear medicine is probably being upgraded as we speak," says Fred as he pats the current imaging system, which celebrated its first birthday this month.

As the technology has grown by leaps and bounds, Fred has kept pace right alongside. Ironically, this Scranton, Pa., native who now considers himself half-"Warwickian," ditched his original career plans to become a veterinarian because of the 10-year commitment to school. Instead, a girl he graduated from high school with pointed him in the radiology direction. He's spent 36 years since maintaining his training and board certifications in a field that's ever-evolving.

The upgrades in equipment result in faster studies and more accurate results, a big plus for the patient. Back in the late '70s, the early CT scans took 45 minutes; today, the same images are ready in 15 seconds. "Digital" is the radiological buzzword, enabling the techs to electronically send an image to a radiologist at any time of the day or night.

Despite the stress of keeping up with an ever-changing field, Fred has taken only four "half-sick" days in 36 years. He's never been a hospital patient himself, but says he just doesn't want to disappoint anyone who's depending on him.

"This is a small hospital. It seems like you know everybody," Fred says.

And after 36 years, everybody seems to know 58-year-old Fred. Be it 2 p.m. or 2 a.m., patients regularly ask for him probably because he's worked with them in the past. His colleagues hold him in high regard. He's the only technologist who does the nuclear medicine at St. Anthony.

Nuclear medicine involves the use of a variety of radioisotopes that are programmed to target specific areas only, such as bones, liver, heart, lungs and so on.

The patient is placed on the gliding stretcher that positions the body on the dual-head rotating imaging system. Dual heads mean the front and back of the lungs, for example, can be viewed simultaneously, cutting the scan time in half. As the computer collects

the data, it appears in two windows on Fred's computer screen. The radioisotopes provide the contrast in the image. A healthy lung would appear solid white.

"Once you've learned the basic stuff like positioning the patient and how to run the equipment, the biggest challenge is learning the computer language for the new piece of equipment," Fred says.

Fred uses a computer programmed with protocols for every part of the body, which he has helped modify based on their specific needs. Because he also deals with radiation, self-monitoring is required.

"I still have my fingers," he says. "The exposure is really minimal if you're careful."

Fred doesn't see retirement in his future.

"I'd miss this place too much," he says. "And no matter what happens with technology, they'll still need the tech to push the button."