

New hospital leads changes in South Bay cancer care community

By Lisa Winer.

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San Jose is slated to get a new hospital in early 2008. The California Center for Healthcare and Biomedical Technology (CCHBT) will provide services to patients with musculoskeletal, cardiovascular and oncology disorders. The for-profit, physician-owned hospital will be located in San Jose's Edenvale Park.

CCHBT has been six years in the making and will give its physician owners a chance to work in an environment tailored specifically to their needs. The doctors involved want to "be able to develop their practice in the way they would like, instead of being controlled or boxed in" says John Kelley, MD, a South Bay anesthesiologist who is one of the principal developers of the project.

Another motivation behind creating the new hospital is a wish to reclaim some of the power doctors feel they have lost in their ability to provide patient care.

"Physicians are being disenfranchised about being able to make decisions about the quality of health care," says Thomas Kula, MD, a South Bay orthopedic surgeon and principal hospital developer.

The three principal developers, Kelley, Kula, and South Bay orthopedic surgeon John Lettice, MD, are particularly excited about the location of the new hospital, near the San Jose BioCenter.

They hope to use their proximity to this biotechnology center to gain access to the latest medical technology.

"Here in Silicon Valley we have massive biotech companies next door, yet we never talk to them" says James Lilja, MD, a South Bay gynecologic oncologist who is considering becoming a physician owner.

Lilja foresees the location as an opportunity to speed up the transfer of technology from the bench to the clinician.

Plans for the hospital include the establishment of a nonprofit research institute. "Integration with the nearby biotechnology companies would allow for the eventual development of a world-class research and educational institution" the CCHBT business plan states.

Changes in the Bay Area

It could prove to be a challenging time to open a new hospital as oncology care in the South Bay is shifting. Kaiser Permanente is scheduled to open its own stand-alone radiation oncology facility at the Homestead Campus of Kaiser Permanente Santa Clara Medical Center in May. The new \$23 million facility will bring in-house services that Kaiser currently farms out to other local hospitals.

"We felt that it was economically a good idea, and that also it was a tremendous boon for the convenience of our members" says spokesperson Karl Sonkin.

Kaiser patients will not need to "schlep around" to receive their treatments, and the transfer of information between doctors will be seamless with Kaiser's online databases, says Sonkin.



The San Jose BioCenter is near where the new hospital will be located in south San Jose.

Several local hospitals accustomed to handling the managed care organization's medical needs will take a significant economic hit. According to Joanne Allen, chief operating officer of San Jose's O'Connor Hospital, 43 percent of that hospital's radiation oncology charges come from Kaiser members.

O'Connor plans to launch an outreach effort to local oncologists to try to drive more business to its program.

At El Camino Hospital of Mountain View, Kaiser represents about 20 percent of the hospital's radiation oncology business. While they are not happy about losing Kaiser's business, spokesperson Judy Twitchell says that El Camino has plans to strengthen its existing cancer program.

Beginning in August cancer care services will be centralized in one location. The hospital has hired a new executive director of cancer services, Carol Wilcox, who was previously administrative director of Stanford's cancer center. The hospital also has added a new oncologist and new thoracic cancer surgeon to its staff and has plans to increase the number of clinical trials it is doing.

"There's a lot more activity than there has been in the past," says Twitchell. "It's just a perfect fit for this community hospital".

But the changes don't stop there.

Regional Medical Center of San Jose, a for-profit hospital owned by HCA Inc., has plans to beef up its radiation oncology services. It will incorporate the Cancer Care Institute, formerly a part of the now defunct San Jose Medical Center, also an HCA hospital. Regional also is investing in a new linear accelerator.

So while cancer patients have a slew of new options, oncologists and area hospitals are adjusting to major shifts in the cancer care community.

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