The University of Kansas Cancer Center earns National Cancer Institute designation

KANSAS CITY, KAN. – The University of Kansas Cancer Center was joined by national, state and local leaders today to celebrate its selection for designation as a National Cancer Institute (NCI) cancer center.

The National Cancer Institute recommended The University of Kansas Cancer Center for the designation at a June 25 meeting in Bethesda, Md., endorsing a nearly decade-long effort that has brought top cancer researchers, access to advanced care and millions of dollars in cancer research funding to the region and inspired profound advances in the care of cancer patients.

“The National Cancer Institute has recognized our scientific excellence, and the designation validates what we already knew – that research conducted at The University of Kansas Cancer Center is already helping to eliminate the burden of cancer,” said Roy A. Jensen, M.D., director of The University of Kansas Cancer Center. “We are extremely proud of what this designation means – and it’s a dream that could not have become a reality without the commitment and enthusiasm shown by thousands of our closest friends.”

As a result of the designation, Jensen said, patients will have access to clinical trials that are available only to NCI-designated cancer centers. The University of Kansas Cancer Center will be able to apply for federal research grants only available to NCI-designated cancer centers, with the potential for bringing millions in additional funding to the area.

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University leaders praised the phenomenal outpouring of support demonstrated throughout the region. Through efforts initially led by the Kansas Masons, hundreds of private donors have given more than $107 million to the KU Endowment Association in support of the effort to attain NCI designation. The Kansas legislature has included annual appropriations to support the cancer center since 2007, reflecting the leadership of three administrations and both political parties. The Kansas Bioscience Authority has been a critical funding partner with key investments to recruit top research faculty. Local financial support has also been generated from the 1/8-cent Johnson County Education and Research Triangle sales tax to support the KU Clinical Research Center in Fairway, where scientists are now conducting early-stage clinical trials of cancer drugs developed by KU researchers. And hospitals across the state, from inner-city Kansas City, Mo., to Goodland, Kan., have joined the KU-based Midwest Cancer Alliance, a network designed to bring clinical trials closer to patients throughout the region.

“Achieving this designation has been the university’s top research priority because of the benefits it will provide to patients and our region,” said University of Kansas Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little. “The cancer center is a shining example of how KU is building healthy communities and making discoveries that will change the world. This designation, and the community effort that went into earning it, will improve and save lives for years to come.”

Patients throughout the region have already benefitted from the drive to earn NCI designation.

“We have become a destination for world-class cancer care. Now the NCI has validated what cancer patients throughout the region already knew: The University of Kansas Cancer Center is one of the best cancer centers in the country,” said Bob Page, president and chief executive officer of The University of Kansas Hospital. The University of Kansas Hospital’s cancer program ranks in U.S. News & World Report’s Best Hospital list. In 2011, The University of Kansas Cancer center merged with Kansas City Cancer Center to become the area’s premier outpatient cancer care organization.

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The designation also strengthens the University of Kansas Medical Center’s educational missions, said Acting Executive Vice Chancellor Steven Stites, M.D. “We have recruited world-class cancer researchers to our faculty and created a Department of Cancer Biology. These distinguished faculty members will train future generations of oncologists and cancer researchers, building our expertise in translational research, clinical trials and basic science, along with cancer prevention and control.”

Jensen noted NCI designation grant funding will translate into new business and opportunities for growth in the region’s biotechnology industry.

Since 2006, university leaders estimate the NCI effort has created 1,123 jobs and contributed $453 million to the region's economy. Approximately 1,200 University of Kansas Medical Center employees, including faculty, research support, clinical and administrative staff, are specifically devoted to cancer clinical care and research activities.

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The University of Kansas Cancer Center is transforming cancer research and clinical care by linking an innovative approach to drug discovery, delivery, and development to a nationally accredited patient care program. The partnership includes cancer research and healthcare professionals associated with the University of Kansas Medical Center and The University of Kansas Hospital in Kansas City, the University of Kansas in Lawrence, the University of Kansas School of Medicine in Wichita and Salina, The Stowers Institute for Medical Research and the members of the Midwest Cancer Alliance. For more information on The University of Kansas Cancer Center’s research and outreach programs and award-winning patient care offered at the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Care Pavilion and The University of Kansas Hospital, please visit http://kucancercenter.org or call 1-800-332-6048.